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PREFACE

The study of Islam in China is fraught with linguistic challenges. I hope the reader will forgive the absence of foreign scripts in the text; they are omitted for the sake of brevity. Those who wish to see excerpts from original foreign-script texts and terms in the original languages should consult my doctoral dissertation.¹ In their place are roman transliterations to approximate their pronunciation. Although this work contains words from a number of languages, the majority of foreign terms are in Chinese or Arabic, and so I offer the following notes on transliteration.

The transliteration of Chinese follows the pinyin system, which is the official standard in the People's Republic of China and of most contemporary publications. However, like the Library of Congress and the American Library Association guidelines for the romanization of Chinese, I do not include tone marks, as they are quite cumbersome to both typist and reader. I deviate from the ALA-LC guidelines by linking syllables together to reflect the original polysyllabic Chinese compounds (e.g., *qingzhen*).

As for the romanization of Arabic words, I follow the 1997 edition of the *ALA-LC Romanization Tables: Transliteration Schemes for Non-Roman Scripts*. For the few instances of non-Arabic words from other Islamic languages that use the Arabic script (e.g., Persian), I also follow the ALA-LC guidelines for Arabic. For place names and proper nouns that have familiar English spellings (e.g., Mecca), I do use these rather than the ALA-LC transliteration (i.e., Makka). The alphabetic and diacritical correspondences are as follows:

CONSONANTS

ء	(hamza)	ض	ḍ
ا	(n/a)	ط	ṭ
ب	b	ظ	ẓ
ت	t	ع	(‘ayn)
ث	th	غ	gh
ج	j	ف	f
ح	ḥ	ق	q
خ	kh	ك	k
د	d	ل	l
ذ	dh	م	m
ر	r	ن	n
ز	z	ه	h ²
س	s	و	w
ش	sh	ي	y
ص	ṣ		

VOWELS

(Short Vowels)

اَ	a
وُ	u
يَ	i

(Long Vowels)

آ	ā
ؤ	ū
يِ	ī

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In an essay on the trials of scholarship, written toward the end of his career after years of reclusive study, Liu Zhi clearly expressed his natural human desire for companionship and understanding from family and friends, which he often had to sacrifice to his work:

Particularly difficult was the fact that I had no comrades or colleagues. Even kith and kin considered that I could not make a living, which is unfortunate. But I did not rest from pursuing my ambition, and with firm determination continued to expound Islamic learning in order to disseminate it among the people. Thus, I proceeded on my own to work on the manuscript and to edit it, but even so I did not dare to feel overly confident in myself.¹

This passage stands in place of words I could have written to describe my own experiences during the process of writing this book. Scholarship can be extremely solitary. Yet I consider myself fortunate to have had so many people enrich my life as I did my work, and by extension enhance it.

First, I must acknowledge Peter Awn. As my teacher he has opened for me entirely new perspectives on the study of Islam and many other topics. As my advocate he defended my work to others, and as my mentor he instilled in me the belief that my work was important, inspiring me with the confidence to persevere.

I also thank the other members of my dissertation committee, my first scholarly audience: Rachel McDermott, Neguin Yavari, Chun-fang Yu, and Madeleine

Zelin. Without their gracious support and generosity with their time, this project would have been impossible.

I am indebted to all of my Chinese-language teachers over the years, but I must make mention of three of my professors at Columbia, Roger Yeu, Paul Rouzer, and Ghopal Sukhu, who introduced me to the world of classical Chinese literature, thus making my research possible.

Special recognition and profound gratitude is due to Wu Pei-yi, whose encyclopedic knowledge of classical Chinese took me beyond the level of merely reading texts to a deeper understanding of their rich context and layers of complexity. Prof. Wu has acted as much more than an instructor, however; he has been a counselor, providing inestimable insight not only into specific literary works but also into the larger scholarly enterprise, including concrete advice about how to tackle this project as a whole.

With great respect I also remember the late Jeanette Wakin, whose instruction in Arabic was essential in helping me to open the “second front” in this great campaign by making classical Islamic texts accessible to me.

Jonathan Lipman, one of the living experts on Islam in China, was always there to offer a friendly ear as I worked out conceptual strategies, and he then proved invaluable in the transformation of dissertation into book, providing detailed recommendations for revisions and unconditional moral support.

Wang Jianping showed me the most genuine collegial respect and hospitality during my stay in Beijing a decade ago as well as helped me with sources, both acquiring them and understanding them. There are so many others who have taught me along this journey, and it would be impossible to honor each of them adequately for their various contributions, large and small.

I send my “*salām*” to Hei Honglu, a family friend who presented me with my first copy of the *Tianfang dianli*. Like the lay constituencies who enabled the Han Kitāb scholars to pursue their work, he has been a stalwart source of support in our shared aspiration to make Islam, and especially the story of Muslims in China, better known to the world.

There are not words to express the debt of gratitude I owe to my beloved family and dear friends. Edith and Joel Frankel gave me the moral, material, and emotional support without which I could never even have dreamed of accomplishing this work. Risa Frankel Swersey has been an indispensable booster over the years. Brandon Swersey is perhaps still too young to understand how much the light he has brought into my life has helped sustain me. Dr. Richard Feldman, a trusted confidant to my family since I was a small child, was there at crucial junctures to offer his sage advice and to act as a calming force. I thank Robin Morgan for moments of writers’ empathy, not to mention her inexhaustible warmth and care.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The completion of this work marks the end of a protracted journey. Along the way, life has gone on, and so I must also acknowledge all those who have made their impact on my life during the past decade. If I have omitted their names, may they forgive me and know that I am grateful for all the lessons and succor I have received while traveling this path.

Finally, I must acknowledge the process itself, which has taught much about endurance and humility. The latter compels me to acknowledge my own smallness before the mammoth enterprise of pursuing knowledge and promoting truth and to accept full responsibility for any and all errors I have made in this effort.

INTRODUCTION

A simple confluence of facts—that China may soon be challenging the United States in its demand for foreign oil, that world oil production will peak and begin to decline within decades, and that China acts as a major supplier of arms and military technology to oil-rich, predominantly Muslim, Middle Eastern states whose region becomes less stable as oil supplies wane—all but guarantees the importance of Chinese-Islamic relations in the foreseeable future. Given this situation, the informed observer of international affairs would be well served not only by an examination of current relations between China and global Islam, but also of historical encounters between the Chinese and Islamic civilizations, which provide valuable insight into the roots of many of today's political and societal realities. In view of the long history of trade, not only in commodities, but also in ideas, along the geographical continuum that connects western and eastern Asia, recent relations between the Chinese and Islamic spheres of influence are grounded in an ancient tradition of economic, political, and cultural commerce. It is in this latter idea of transcultural transaction that the present study finds its particular context.

The *Tianfang dianli*, an examination of which is central to this work, is the product of the life experiences of its author, Liu Zhi (ca. 1660–ca. 1730), a Chinese Muslim scholar and resident of Nanjing in the early years of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Liu Zhi's background placed him at the apex of the evolution of a Chinese Muslim scholarly network, which produced a unique literary corpus known by the appropriately hybrid Chinese-Islamic name the Han Kitāb.¹ The texts constituting this corpus represent a number of different genres covering a

wide range of subjects, but what links them, generally speaking, is their devotion to Islamic themes and their mode of expression through the classical Chinese idiom of Neo-Confucian literati discourse. As products of China's Muslim intellectual elite, the *Han Kitāb* is a tangible representation of the meeting of two civilizations.

The dialectical encounter between cultures typically produces a variety of syntheses, of which, in this case, the *Han Kitāb* corpus is one. The Confucianized presentation of Islam found in this literature may thus be regarded as a case study in the history of cross-cultural exchange, translation, syncretism, and accommodation of a minority community to the majority culture and society amidst which it lives. The blossoming of the scholarship from which the *Han Kitāb* emerged represents a milestone in the history of ideas. The present study straddles the narrow divide of cultural and intellectual history, examining an instance of syncretism of Chinese and Islamic thought in the writings of a Chinese Muslim scholar who, in many ways, epitomized the ideals of both sides of his dual heritage, embodying the phenomenon of simultaneity. Liu Zhi lived simultaneously in two cultures, each of which contributed to a unique hybrid identity.

These concepts of translation, accommodation, syncretism, assimilation, and simultaneity overlap and subtly interplay in recognizable patterns that have been and are repeated, albeit with some local variation, at different times and in different places throughout global history. In the encounter between civilizations, naturally, translation is invariably both an essential first step to interaction as well as its greatest obstacle. In this dynamic and organic process, as peoples become acquainted, accommodation represents an extension of basic translation and the necessary compromise that allows communication to proceed. Howard Giles' theory of communication accommodation aptly describes how interactants change their mode of communication to conform to different communication situations. It is readily observable that individuals accommodate or change the way they speak in a given situation in order to make themselves intelligible to their audience. Interactants "converge," adapting not only their speech patterns but their behavior and demeanor as well. Psychology and power dynamics play a significant role in this process, as the wish to be liked by others with greater position encourages people to act more like them and thus accommodate to their communication styles when interacting with them.²

When this process extends beyond individual communication to that between groups or communities, we witness the phenomenon of cultural accommodation, a common result of the interaction between minorities and the mainstream majority in whose midst they reside. When this process of adaptation lasts long enough or the pressures to conform are sufficiently great—particularly when sojourners become residents, as in the case of China's early Muslim immigrants—

those speech patterns and behaviors that were once borrowed often become natural, assimilated, as it were. When assimilation penetrates the surface of material culture into group consciousness, it produces communities that straddle, or blur, civilizational boundaries and participate simultaneously in two or more cultures, often creating a new, hybrid culture of their own. This simultaneity is not merely a strategy or survival technique, but a genuine ontological shift, not only in identity and social positioning, but in consciousness and cognition as well. It produces individuals who can comfortably navigate the apparent incongruities of different cultures and “think” in multiple categories and idioms. Syncretism in the realm of ideas is then the obvious, logical product of the evolution of a genuine simultaneity of identity and consciousness. Such is the case of Chinese Muslims generally, and of Liu Zhi more specifically, whose heritage of accommodation and assimilation produced a simultaneity that resulted in the sophisticated syncretic thought found in the Han Kitāb literature.

The phenomenon of cultural and intellectual simultaneity that lies at the heart of this work runs throughout the multifaceted scholarship on Islam in China and Chinese Muslims. The present study unavoidably grazes the topic of the cultural and intellectual evolution of an ethno-religious community, though it is more specifically concerned with the history of certain religio-philosophical ideas developed by Liu Zhi. Insofar as my work attempts to place the scholar in his historical and social context, it cannot help but refer to issues associated more generally with the study of minority cultures in China, namely, how a minority negotiates its identity in relation to the surrounding majority.

Studies of this aspect of Islam in China have juxtaposed two polar reactions by minorities to the majority society and culture: differentiation on the one hand, and assimilation, a trend that threatens the survival of the minority culture as a distinct entity, on the other. These are universal themes that recur, albeit with some variation, wherever and whenever minority communities have lived long enough amidst a dominant majority to have to choose between clinging to their “otherness” or losing their distinct identity in order to merge into the mainstream, or some middle alternative between these extremes. The history of Muslims in China presents itself as a fruitful case study of these familiar patterns precisely because the phenomenon was widespread and long-lived enough to offer a range of responses to the imperative to conform to Chinese social and cultural norms.

Within this context, it should come as little surprise that in the history of Islam in China, we find patterns of development that mirror and are mirrored by those associated with other ethno-religious communities throughout Chinese history. Notably, we find striking parallels with the history of Jewish and Christian communities in China. As examined in detail in the final chapter of this book, the evolution of accommodative strategies, theological notions, and modes of

literary expression among the three Abrahamic traditions in China indicates, at least, parallel development under the influence of similar cultural, political, and social pressures. These similarities may very well also suggest direct interaction and mutual influence across the boundaries of these various faith communities.

Given the historical conditions encountered by Muslims under imperial Chinese rule over more than a millennium, it makes perfect sense that their experiences also parallel those of other minority ethno-religious communities in far-flung regions and epochs of world history. Similar vicissitudes of persecution and tolerance have characterized these histories, ranging from pogroms, to policies of compelled assimilation, to the rise to positions of wealth and influence by outstanding members of each community under the aegis of local powers and principalities. A significant question faced by all minority communities in their navigation of the mainstream is that of identity, that is, who they are as defined by their relation to the majority. The challenge of living as a minority produces a range of alternative identities, some imposed by the dominant majority and others by members of the minority upon themselves, as it were, in the majority's shadow or reflection. Thus, Muslims in China, despite centuries of residence in the country and intermarriage with Han Chinese, have been and continue to be regarded as an ethno-religious minority community of foreign ancestry rather than a segment of the mainstream majority who happen to follow a particular religious tradition. Questions of Chinese Muslim identity are therefore reminiscent of similar questions confronted by other ethno-religious minorities in China and elsewhere, for example, the question of whether Judaism ought to be defined as a religion or an ethnicity. Muslims in contemporary China face a similar quandary, whereas, as we shall see, some of their ancestors—under different historical, ideological, and social pressures—had to address the more philosophical question of whether Islam was a foreign religion or a particular manifestation of the universal Dao.

Like other ethno-religious minorities worldwide and throughout history, Muslims in China have also been cited as an example of a diaspora community. Patterns of migration, dispersal, settlement, and assimilation of Muslims in China do indeed show characteristics of diasporicity. For instance, Muslims whose ancestors arrived and settled in China were effectively cut off from frequent or extensive contact with their brethren in the Islamic heartlands and were left to fend for themselves without the support of any Islamic state. In this way, the Muslims in imperial China may actually have shared more common experiences with the Jewish diaspora, whether in the East or in the West, than they did with other Muslim minorities living in different contexts where they had a more proximal relationship to a nexus of Islamic culture and/or political power.³

Chinese Muslim diasporicity has produced cultural manifestations, particularly in the area of literature, that are also responsive to common minority

experiences. Understandably, once they had built up, through centuries of assimilation, a critical mass of literacy in the local scholarly idiom, Chinese Muslims began to produce the literature known collectively as Han Kitāb. At first, the loss of Arabic and Persian as quotidian spoken languages necessitated the translation of religious texts from the Islamic languages into classical Chinese. After this initial phase, in subsequent generations the composition of original Han Kitāb texts included works such as the *Huihui yuanlai* (The Origin of Islam), attributed to Liu Zhi's father, Liu Sanjie (ca. 1630–1710), which traces the mytho-historical origins of Islam, focusing on its arrival and early development in China.⁴

Texts dealing with Chinese Muslim origins attempt to make sense of a minority community's struggle to exist in a foreign context amidst a frequently hostile majority population that does not share the minority's cultural and religious beliefs and practices. These texts, and the Han Kitāb in general, were written in the local language of scholarly discourse and thus reflected the purpose of reaching a dual audience: highly literate readers from within the author's own community who were assimilated into the dominant culture, as well as readers from outside that community. As such, books containing origin narratives, the *Tianfang dianli* among them, were simultaneously intended to persuade lapsed members of the Chinese Muslim community of the validity, and even superiority, of their ancestral tradition, while also justifying the tradition, in the face of prejudice and persecution, to outsiders. These works thus reflect the dual and interrelated needs of stemming the tide of assimilation in order to prevent the loss of a distinct ethno-religious identity, as well as defending the faith from attack by critics both within and outside the community.

Liu Zhi continued a long-standing tradition of translating Islamic religious texts into classical Chinese, but he also produced works that reflected original thought and innovative methodology. His writings include a great many Neo-Confucian terms and concepts in a systematic presentation of Islamic metaphysics, ritual, and history. This syncretism is epitomized in Liu Zhi's so-called "*Tianfang* trilogy" consisting of his last three major works: *Tianfang xingli*, *Tianfang dianli*, and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*. These texts not only employ Neo-Confucian language and ideas, but, perhaps more than any of the other Han Kitāb, they also reflect an acceptance of the essential ethical and metaphysical harmony of Islam and Confucianism and thus represent the heights of Muslim intellectual accommodation to the Chinese cultural paradigm.

In the process of expressing his ethnic, cultural, philosophical, and religious simultaneity, Liu Zhi implicitly accepted the rationality of the dominant Confucian ideology of his day, while also addressing the gamut of major religio-philosophical traditions in late Ming–early Qing period China. Accommodating his thought to the rational standard of contemporary Chinese thought, in his

presentation of Islam Liu Zhi downplayed the role of revelation, expounding instead theological concepts with frequent reference to natural law and sophisticated metaphysical arguments of Neo-Confucian *lixue* (lit. “study of principle”). In terms of Islamic orthopraxy, he harmonized Muslim religious practice with the Confucian principle of ritual (*li*), thus demonstrating that Islam is built upon the same central pillar of civilization as Confucian culture is. Liu Zhi’s treatment of Islamic ritual law is unique in that he is the only Han Kitāb author to have devoted a book exclusively to the subject. But the *Tianfang dianli* is more than a manual of praxis; it also seeks to justify Islamic religious practices ethically, philosophically, metaphysically, and even cosmologically. Thus, Liu Zhi lays out in its first four chapters arguments for the existence of Allah in a linguistic idiom and cultural context devoid of a historical monotheistic tradition. He attempts to show his Muslim readers that they could believe in and follow Islam without betraying their Chinese, Confucian heritage. He may not have successfully persuaded non-Muslim readers of Islam’s exclusive truth, but the way Liu Zhi integrated Islamic and Confucian tenets certainly served the greater cause of defending his religion and co-religionists from official criticism. Furthermore, it ingratiated him with influential members of the Confucian literati elite, who, according to prefaces written by some of them for his texts, seem to have accepted him as one of their own.

In the chapters that follow, we explore Liu Zhi’s background, his intellectual development, and his specific body of work and its legacy. Chapter 1 traces the methodology of this study and attempts to place Liu Zhi in his historical context. Chapter 2 provides his background in the historical development of the Chinese Muslim intellectual tradition. It further examines his sources and influences, as well as his legacy, including the recognition (after Liu Zhi’s death) of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu*, the official compendium of state-accepted literature under the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796). In chapter 3, we delve into the contents of Liu Zhi’s work, focusing on the author’s use of specific Chinese terms and concepts, their origins and meanings in Chinese thought, and their correspondence to Islamic principles.

As we focus even more narrowly in chapter 4 on arguably Liu Zhi’s most famous and influential work, the *Tianfang dianli*, we look more closely at his specific usage of the concept of ritual as a common foundation of both Confucian morality and social order and of Islamic piety. We next examine how Liu Zhi attempted to provide a theoretical substratum for his exposition of Muslim orthopraxy by expressing Islamic orthodoxy in Chinese philosophical terms. Chapter 5 thus contains a detailed analysis of the first four chapters of the *Tianfang dianli* before briefly dealing with the sinicized elements of Islamic praxis in the remaining chapters of Liu Zhi’s book. Finally, after having witnessed the subtlety and finesse of Liu Zhi’s syncretism and harmonization of essential Chinese and

Islamic religio-philosophical ideas, in chapter 6 we deal with the single greatest challenge facing him and his fellow Han Kitāb scholars: the translation of Islam's uncompromising monotheism into Chinese. In chapter 5 we will have encountered theological terminology and sophisticated metaphysical arguments. In the final chapter, we will trace the origin of these, including the neologisms coined by Liu Zhi and his colleagues to name Allah in Chinese. In this study, we see that one of the difficulties experienced by Chinese Muslim scholars is to simultaneously maintain fidelity to their Islamic faith while avoiding Confucian charges of heterodoxy. We see how the Han Kitāb scholars, and Liu Zhi in particular, were influenced by the literature of earlier apologetic translators of Abrahamic monotheism in China and how they retraced some of their steps while avoiding some of their more obvious missteps, all in the context of the ongoing, syncretic dialectic of Chinese civilization.

The heirs of Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb innovators found a way to navigate the vicissitudes of their own cultural diaspora by constructing a truly simultaneous identity, at ease with both sides of its dual heritage. The conceptualization of works such as the *Tianfang dianli* represents a vision of Islam that is unlike any found elsewhere, aptly described by Jonathan Lipman in his play on a Chinese Socialist slogan: "Islam with Chinese characteristics."⁵ The Islam presented by Liu Zhi is remarkably Chinese not only in its superficial expression, but even in its core values, and yet it remains unmistakably Islamic. Perhaps this is attributable in large part to the fact that Liu Zhi and his Han Kitāb colleagues were so successful at embracing both the outward trappings and essential ethos of the literati class, whose status was paramount in traditional Chinese society, not unlike the role of the classic 'ulamā' in Islamic society. Because Chinese Islam developed scholarly institutions and a literary tradition, it was able to fuel a social-intellectual-cultural movement among the more sinicized Muslims of eastern and central China. This movement, in turn, was capable of producing outstanding individuals who could promote their accommodative vision of Islam with ever-increasing sophistication, systematization, and eloquence. Liu Zhi, commonly regarded as an epitomic figure in this history, contributed significantly to the refinement, legitimization, and popularization of this aspect of a simultaneously Chinese-Islamic culture, residing rather comfortably in the space where two civilizations meet.

CHAPTER 1

THE WORLD OF LIU ZHI

The multifaceted nature of Islam in China invites us to view it with an adjustable lens, sometimes focusing widely over a span of centuries and across vast geography, sometimes requiring a narrower scope to view particular circumstances of time and place. Our overview of the writings of Liu Zhi requires a similar flexible perspective. A wide focus allows us to place Liu Zhi in the grand scheme of the historical development of Islamic and especially Chinese society and culture. A narrow perspective reveals that neither “China” nor “Islam” is the seamless monolith it appears to be from a distance.

At a global level of magnification we see Islam in China straddling two worlds, and it is here that we encounter Chinese Muslims acting as mediators between these two worlds along sometimes literal, sometimes metaphorical frontiers. Even greater magnification and a narrower focus show “Islam in China” to be no more monolithic a phenomenon than either of the two great civilizations that constitute its name. China’s Muslims are separated from each other, as members of distinct solidarities or as individuals, by geography, living as they do throughout the vast country. They are and have been also divided along ethnic, linguistic, economic, educational, sectarian, and kinship lines, among many others. Some Chinese Muslims, because of greater geographical proximity and stronger lines of communication and transportation to the heartlands of Islam, feel a deeper connection to Muslims living outside China than to co-religionists elsewhere in China. As a result, Muslims residing in western parts of China have often drawn their religious and cultural inspiration more directly from the Islamic world. Others have come to live lives more remote from their Islamic brethren

outside China and have seen their existence and their future as being intimately and inextricably linked to the fortunes of the Chinese state and society. Observation of these differences among various Muslim communities within the borders of China, in both late imperial and modern times, uncovers deep fissures and wide gaps, which have at times put some Muslims at odds and in open conflict with other Muslims in China.

It is at the next level, beyond the fissures, that a more nuanced picture comes into focus, wherein one can see the complexity of responses that various Chinese Muslim groups and individuals have made to the pressures they confronted. Some of these strategies aimed to promote the prosperity, or ensure the survival, of Chinese Muslim communities; some Chinese Muslims regarded these strategies as crucial even to the very perpetuation of Islam in China. The present study is concerned with one of these strategies: the work of a special class of Chinese Muslim scholars, active during the late Ming–early Qing period (circa sixteenth to eighteenth centuries), who created the Han Kitāb canon. This body of literature collectively was to become a viable expression of Chinese Islamic ideology and identity, widely acknowledged as authoritative by many of China’s more sinicized Muslims. And yet even as the Han Kitāb and the literati network that produced it represent a largely unified movement within the otherwise fractured reality of Chinese Islam, internal nuances within the network and its literature also exist.

As Zvi Ben-Dor has demonstrated in his groundbreaking work on the Chinese Muslim intelligentsia, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China*, several generations of geographically dispersed scholars were linked together by professional, intellectual, social, and kinship bonds, which in many ways paralleled those of non-Muslim Chinese literati networks. The bonds that linked these scholars transcended time and place, and the commonalities among the producers of the Han Kitāb galvanized their network. Despite their connectedness, however, these scholars were individuals, with diverse stories. They lived in a variety of centers scattered throughout central and eastern China, often relocating peripatetically, and their work spanned generations. Although many were related by blood or marriage, the individual Chinese Muslim literati each had his own specific family background; some came from multigenerational scholarly lineages while others were first-generation scholars from mercantile or military families. Such individual differences in background and personal predilections account for variety in the works they produced.

Here our focus narrows yet again, homing in on the specific background of a particular individual in order to isolate factors and underlying conditions that could have influenced, directly or indirectly, the trajectory of his life, thought, and work. The approach of focusing on particularities is one shared by Jonathan Lipman in *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China*. Although

his work focuses on a different facet of Chinese Muslim history, Lipman has occasion to discuss the Han Kitāb literature, and he acknowledges the importance of distinguishing among various texts grouped together under this rubric on the basis of “their authors’ surroundings, religious convictions, and intellectual preferences.”¹ In dealing with the writers of the Han Kitāb in general and Liu Zhi in particular, I find myself guided by similar concerns, leading to a similar methodology that seeks to avoid the conceptual pitfalls of “hegemonic narrative” and the “errors of universalism and overgeneralization that plague the dominant paradigms,” especially in the study of Chinese history.²

An examination of Liu Zhi’s background sheds light on some motivations for undertaking his work and reveals sources of conceptual formulations and intellectual choices in his writings. In the interest of identifying where Liu Zhi differed and/or accorded with other intellectuals from the Islamic, Chinese, and Chinese-Islamic traditions, pinpointing where and when he lived is a crucial first step to analyzing his work. Understanding his connections to the greater traditions to which he was heir, and of the burgeoning network of which he was a part, follows naturally.

In the historical narrative that unfolds, the method of progressively narrowing the foci on both space and time is recommended because the stories of Muslims in China “cannot be told only in the aggregate, in terms of ethnic groups or regions. Rather, we meet individual human beings, follow their decisions and indecisions, try to understand their position as participants in what appears to be two cultures.”³ This is the sort of understanding of Liu Zhi that we seek. The only modification to this methodology that I propose is the use of an adjustable lens, one that not only narrows the focus but can widen it as well. By retaining this flexibility of perspective we can easily shift focus between the particular subject within our narrow scope and the larger context into which it fits. In *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, Benjamin Elman refers to this dual perspective as the integration of the “internal history of ideas” and the “external history of social and political institutions.”⁴ Our perspective must also shift between the “big picture of the major changes” in “Chinese social and intellectual history” and the “microworld of increasingly complex and precise philological analysis.”⁵ The appeal of such a flexible perspective is that even as we zero in on factors that have influenced the life and work of Liu Zhi and analyze the specific content of his writings, we can also see the connection of these factors to other phenomena in the surrounding field.

Having outlined the narrative methodology, we may now construct a picture of arguably the most prolific, systematic, and famous of the Han Kitāb writers. This assessment is supported by the breadth and volume of Liu Zhi’s work; his fame among Chinese Muslims, who still revere his writings and his memory; and

the unquestionable linguistic talent demonstrated by his ability to translate from both Arabic and Persian and to communicate in an elegant *wenyan*, classical Chinese writing style. Non-Muslim Confucian literati praised his literary elegance in prefaces to his books, and even one of his critics attested to his mastery of language in the form of a backhanded compliment: “His literary style is actually rather elegant. However, the premise is at its root untrue, so the clever literary ornamentation does him no good.”⁷⁶ Indeed, Liu Zhi’s remarkable achievements and personal history justify the claim that he “can be considered the quintessential Chinese Muslim scholar in that he existed at the center—chronological, dynastic and geographic—of the Chinese Muslim educational system.”⁷⁷

Most of the information we have concerning Liu Zhi’s life and career comes from autobiographical statements scattered throughout forewords and introductions to his major works, as well as claims made by his colleagues and friends, both Muslim and non-Muslim, in laudatory prefaces to his books. The obvious tendency toward bias and hyperbole notwithstanding, such sources are not unusual in their cultural and intellectual contexts, and traditional Chinese historiography is replete with them. In the mid-seventeenth century members of the Chinese Muslim intellectual network, acting increasingly in the manner of a distinct Chinese school, took up the Chinese literati practice of writing self-reflective literature about themselves, “their scholarship, their institutions of learning, and their educational curriculum.”⁷⁸ They also began to attach autobiographical statements to their larger books and treatises.

In 1677, Zhao Can (1607–ca. 1695) published a record of Chinese Muslim scholarly lineages, the *Jingxue xi zhuanpu* (Genealogy of Transmission of Lineage and Classical Learning). The historicity of its content must be taken with a grain of salt, as some of its accounts verge on hagiography. Its greater value lies in its mirroring, in style and genre, works of non-Muslim Chinese elites, such that its very existence reveals how the Chinese Muslim intelligentsia regarded itself as a class of scholars equal to their non-Muslim counterparts. Thus we approach the sources on Liu Zhi just as we must approach studies of other Chinese scholars and historical figures, whose primary sources are frequently texts similar in style to those available to researchers of the Han Kitāb scholars. Sinologists typically do not balk at the use of such sources in the context of non-Muslim Chinese historiography, and we need not do so here so long as we remain conscious of pious embellishments intended to idealize the character of the subject while praising his achievements. Keeping this in mind, we may presume that the basic outline of the individual’s biography is reliable and find value even in exaggerated narratives, as these reflect the central interests and motivations of the community that produced them.

Beholden to these sources on Liu Zhi, we encounter not only their inherent biases but also their limitations. There are significant gaps in the story one is able

to construct from the biographical sources at our disposal. However, if one is willing to accept at face value the claims made in the available sources, one can actually arrive at a nearly complete view of Liu Zhi's most active years, the major gaps coming mostly at the beginning and end of his life.

LIU ZHI'S EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

Verifying the exact dates of Liu Zhi's birth and death is problematic. The consensus is that he was born around 1660; the exact year of his death is even more elusive, but it occurred sometime after 1724. What is clear is that his life overlaps roughly the entire reign of the Kangxi emperor (1662–1722), a period of consolidation for the newly established Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Liu Zhi was born in Shangyuan (present-day Nanjing), which by the early eighteenth century was already well established as a center for Chinese Muslim scholarship and a nexus of Chinese literati activity in general.

Liu Zhi was born into a scholarly family. His father, Liu Sanjie, was active in the Chinese Muslim educational network as a student and teacher at the Islamic school founded by Yuan Shengzhi (b. ca. 1620) in Nanjing. Liu Sanjie was not only affiliated with the Yuan family by scholarly lineage, but he was also related to them through ties of kinship and marriage. Liu Zhi tells us that his father was distressed by the dearth of Islamic literature in Chinese⁹ and, in an attempt to remedy this situation, translated at least one book on Islamic ritual and law, the *Tianfang lifa* (Ritual Law of Islam). Liu Sanjie also composed another Han Kitāb book, the *Qingzhen jiaoshuo* (Explanation of Islam), and a third, the *Huihui yuanlai*, is attributed to him. He also wrote one of twenty-four “dedications” (*zengyan*) to Ma Zhu (b. 1640) for his *Qingzhen zhinan* (Guide to Islam), thus placing him among the “who’s who” list of Chinese Muslim intellectuals of his generation.¹⁰ Liu Sanjie “had never attained his desire to make his own contribution to the Chinese discussions of Islamic philosophy,”¹¹ but he did pass this desire on to Liu Zhi, who realized his father’s lofty aspirations. And while Liu Zhi clearly surpassed his father in both talent and achievement, he spoke of the inspiration he received from Liu Sanjie in highly self-deprecatory terms of filial respect:

My late father thought that ritual law was not understood clearly. As I am but his son and not clever, how shall I ever dare here to aspire to such ambition and say that I shall continue his undertaking? Therefore, I only transmit what I have learned.¹²

Such filiality and reverence for the learned tradition also evoke core Confucian values, as the final phrase of this passage echo Confucius’ famous self-description:

“I have transmitted what was taught to me without making up anything of my own.”¹³

What Liu Zhi learned, first from his father and then, starting around the age of twelve, from his principal teacher, Yuan Ruqi (b. ca. 1640), son of Yuan Shengzhi,¹⁴ was the basic curriculum of the Jingtang (lit. “Scripture Hall”) educational system as it had evolved up to his time. Liu Zhi’s primary education presumably began at home with his father and continued under Yuan Ruqi at the mosque at the Wuxueyuan (Garden of Military Studies) in Nanjing. Little is written about the exact course of studies there, but it probably consisted of learning to read and recite the Qur’ān and preliminary instruction in Arabic and Persian. This curriculum was standard in the Jingtang educational system. Like other young Chinese Muslim students, Liu Zhi’s education presumably began with an introduction to Qur’ānic Arabic, as well as training in the basic ritual obligations and daily practices incumbent on Sunni Muslims.

His early education must also have included learning how to read and write Chinese, for by the age of fifteen he was able to begin studying the Confucian canon on his own. In the earliest days of the Jingtang educational reforms, an introduction to Chinese classics and histories helped round out a curriculum that still lacked Islamic texts in Chinese. By Liu Zhi’s time, however, a number of Islamic texts had already been translated from Arabic and Persian and a few original texts were composed in the preceding generations, so some portion of his preliminary training was most probably in these Chinese Islamic texts.

Under the strong influence of his father and teacher, Liu Zhi was groomed from childhood to continue the family tradition of Islamic scholarship. The factors of his background, of where and when he lived and of who his forebears were, all contributed to Liu Zhi’s preparation, motivation, and resolve to embark on a scholarly career at the age of fifteen. If we take him at his word, Liu Zhi was precocious but not altogether unusual. Liu Zhi’s account may be truthful, because only by starting his career so young could he possibly become the prolific scholar he did. At the same time, we must note that the age of fifteen would certainly have held special significance for Liu Zhi, as for any Confucian, evoking as it does Confucius’ well-known saying in the *Lunyu*: “From fifteen, my heart-and-mind was set upon on learning.”¹⁵ When describing his own education and formative years, Liu Zhi used almost exactly the same phrase, an obvious homage to the tradition.¹⁶

It is quite fitting then that at this highly symbolic age Liu Zhi embarked on his study of the canon of Confucian classics, as well as Chinese dynastic histories. While he began these studies later than one normally would in order to become an official examination candidate, this certainly gave him a stronger foundation in classical Chinese than that to which most Chinese Muslims, not to mention the vast majority of ordinary non-Muslim Chinese, could ever aspire. Obviously impressed

by the depth and breadth of Chinese literature Liu Zhi had read, the non-Muslim Confucian official Jing Rizhen, imperial censor of the Shaanxi Circuit, commented on Liu Zhi's level of attainment in his preface to the *Tianfang dianli*:

The gentleman Liu, who goes by the style name of Jielian, is mild-mannered and restrained, studious and fond of books. Drawing from a variety of scriptures and classics, histories, novels, romances, fiction, fictitious histories, law books, books of divinations, as well as the writings of the Two Schools [i.e., Buddhism and Daoism], there is nothing he did not peruse or research. Furthermore, he was also able to reconcile all of the above with the Six Classics. He researched into the totality of Neo-Confucian metaphysics,¹⁷ and deeply fathomed the essential subtleties of the Confucian literati tradition.¹⁸

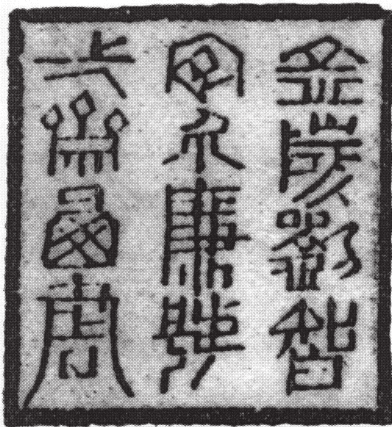
After eight years of immersion in the Confucian canon, Liu Zhi then returned for six years to the study of Islamic books in Arabic and Persian. Next, displaying an unusually cosmopolitan and ecumenical mind, he devoted three years to studying Buddhist texts and one year to Daoist writings. In a preface to his final major work, Liu Zhi wrote that during this latter stage of his studies he also read numerous "Occidental books" (*Xiyang shu*).¹⁹ There has been some debate as to exactly what this nebulous description might have encompassed. Most scholars agree that it refers the literature of the Jesuits, who maintained a strong presence in Nanjing during the late Ming–early Qing period.²⁰

The Jesuit literature included European texts translated into Chinese²¹ as well as original Christian apologia in Chinese, repositories of Confucian-Christian syncretism—written by Jesuit missionaries, beginning with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), and their Chinese literati converts. We cannot be certain exactly which "Occidental books" Liu Zhi read, but he was far more knowledgeable about Islam and the Judeo-Christian tradition than the average Chinese scholar of his day, and he certainly knew more about the so-called "San Jiao," China's "Three Teachings" (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism), than virtually any other Muslim at the time. His erudition clearly made a strong impression on the assimilated Chinese Muslim Yang Peilu, who showered praise on his colleague in another *Tianfang dianli* preface:

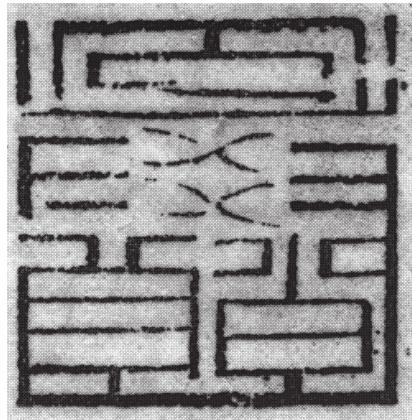
He studied the Islamic classics in his youth, and tackled Confucian studies when he grew older. He subsequently amassed besides a broad knowledge of the Two Schools and European literature. Indeed, there is nothing that he has not grown familiar with, but through painstaking and exhaustive research.²²

The overwhelming majority of Liu Zhi's Chinese literati contemporaries knew only one written language, Chinese. If some of them knew another, it would have been Manchu, Mongolian, or Tibetan, languages of important minority communities in the Qing empire. Among native users of Chinese, only those few who had converted to Roman Catholicism, who would have studied some Latin or other European languages, could even approach the Han Kitāb authors' capacity to read non-Qing texts. These men were unique in both the Muslim and Chinese intellectual worlds by virtue of participating simultaneously in both as insiders. Liu Zhi's linguistic abilities and his willingness to use an eclectic array of texts made him "one of the best educated, most versatile and widely read scholars—Muslim or otherwise—to work in China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries."²³

After the formative years of his childhood and adolescence under the mentorship of his father and Yuan Ruqi, and eighteen years of deep immersion in his independent studies, at thirty-three years of age Liu Zhi possessed a unique array of academic abilities and intellectual tools. He was thus fully prepared to embark on his career and assume the mantle of the leading figure in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Liu Zhi had probably already tried his hand at writing at this stage of his career. However, he was untested and had yet to find his voice as a scholar and author.



a. 金陵劉智字介廉號一齋西周
Jinling Liu Zhi zi Jielián hào Yīzhāi Xīzhōu
 "Liu Zhi, known by the *zi* Jielián and the style name *Yīzhāi Xīzhōu*, of Jinling (Nanjing)"



b. 願學
Yuan Xue "Willing to Study"

FIGURE 1. Liu Zhi's Seals

He came from an important scholarly lineage and family in a cultural center, and as “the son of a teacher and the disciple of a major teacher (Yuan Ruqi), Liu’s networks of filiation brought him into contact with all of the major teachers and scholarly figures of his time.”²⁴ Likely among the prominent Chinese Muslim scholars he met in his youth was the most famous Han Kitāb author of the previous generation, Ma Zhu, who was famous for his writings but even better known for his travels, which brought him to virtually every major Muslim center in China. Along the way Ma Zhu met all the important figures in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Consequently, despite his origins in remote Yunnan province, Ma Zhu became a linchpin in the further growth of the network on the eve of its greatest period of development.

It is impossible to say exactly what impact Liu Zhi’s putative encounter with Ma Zhu may have had on the young Islamic student.²⁵ Even after his educational preparation, as he began writing, Liu Zhi still lacked the worldly experiences that would integrate him fully into the scholarly network. Therefore, he began to travel through eastern China in search of new texts and teachers. In so doing, Liu Zhi, like Ma Zhu before him, put into practice the advice given to She Yunshan (b. ca. 1635) by one of his teachers: “If one does not travel for [the sake of] studying, [one] will not be able to reach completeness.”²⁶ Travel in pursuit of knowledge is a time-honored tradition in Islam, as in other religious traditions, as attested to by the oft-repeated Ḥadīth: “Seek knowledge, even though it be in China for, verily, the pursuit of knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim.”

Neither Liu Zhi nor his father, teacher, or other associates is known to have traveled abroad. Liu Zhi did, however, travel fairly extensively between the large cities of eastern China, in a manner common among non-Muslim Chinese literati. This would have been no mean feat at a time when the political consolidation of the Qing dynasty was still underway and rebellions persisted south of the Yangzi River during the late seventeenth century. Perhaps this is why Lipman insists that Liu Zhi “remained all of his life in the narrow corridor between the lower Yangzi valley and Beijing.”²⁷ However, other scholars speculate that his travels extended to China’s heavily Muslim northwest, including Shaanxi and perhaps even Gansu.²⁸ Jin Yijiu enumerates the destinations of Liu Zhi’s first major journey, based on biographical sources from the period containing traditional place names:

Even after completing a portion of his manuscripts, Liu Zhi did not dare presume or feel confident about his work, so he packed provisions, shouldered his bundle and took to the road. He traveled through Qi and Lu [present-day Shandong] to the gates of the capital [Beijing]. There he paid a formal visit to a notable gentleman from whom he asked advice. From Chu [present-day Hubei and Hunan] he entered

Western Qin [present-day Shaanxi] where he sought a place to stay and study long-neglected religious texts. He passed through the Wu Gate²⁹ and roamed Wulin,³⁰ going beyond Guiji.³¹ He finally arrived in Yuedong,³² where he made inquiries and read the books in the Hu family's Tianlu Pavilion library, finding there what he never could before.³³

Liu Zhi's travels played an instrumental role in his evolution from student to scholar. In addition to facilitating his research, travel allowed him, perhaps more importantly, to discover renewed motivation at various stages of his career. For example, later in life he continued to acquire knowledge and sources away from home, including a rare copy of a Persian biography of the Prophet Muḥammad³⁴ that would become the basis of this last major work, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* (True Record of the Ultimate Sage of Islam).³⁵ On the last leg of the same journey in 1720, Liu Zhi was inspired to write about the Islamic "sage" (Muḥammad) on a pilgrimage to the home and tomb of the Chinese sage, Confucius, in Qufu.

In addition to his acquisition of material sources, in his travels Liu Zhi made valuable contacts with fellow scholars and potential patrons among the Chinese Muslim scholarly network and its larger constituency. Among the latter group was Hei Mingfeng, a Muslim military official from Shandong Province,³⁶ who wrote prefaces to all of Liu Zhi's early works and a commentary to the *Tianfang xingli*.³⁷ If Liu Zhi had not traveled in Shandong, he might not have developed this important relationship with the man who was to become his primary source of support early in his scholarly career. In this way, Liu Zhi's travels may be seen as the transition between his studies and the period of his scholarly productivity upon returning to Nanjing.

NANJING, THE JIANGNAN REGION, AND THEIR MUSLIM POPULATION

Chinese culture has traditionally put tremendous importance on the idea of the individual's ties to his or her ancestral home and/or native place.³⁸ The sense of longing for, and belonging to, the place of one's ancestral origins is a recurring theme in Chinese literature, commonly associated in classical poetry and prose with the displacement of leaving home. Centuries of warfare, political turmoil, famine, drought, and natural disaster have meant that millions of people in China have been uprooted and transplanted in search of peace, security, and livelihood. Traditional Chinese culture has therefore also recognized the possibility of developing attachments to a new home, even as one pines for the land of one's ancestors. The environment of one's new home also has the power to reshape the

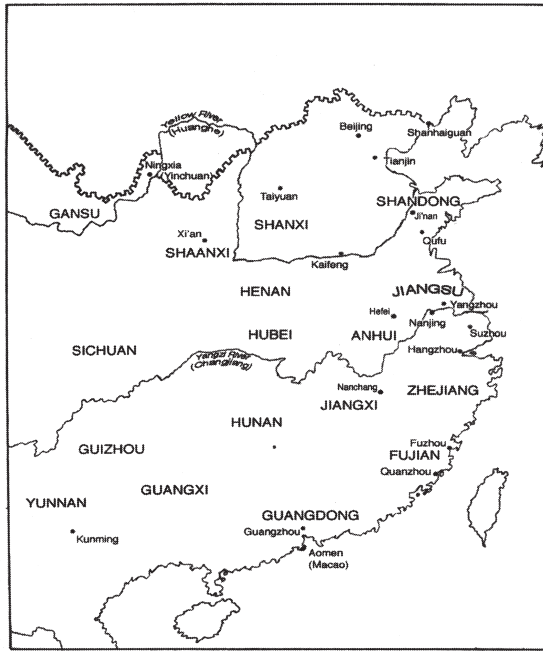


FIGURE 2. Map of Eastern-Central China with Provinces and Key Cities

individual, as one becomes naturalized there. Thus, even as there exists a belief in the linkage between one's blood and ancestral land, there is also the idea that one is influenced by conditions in a new locality. The traditional Chinese adage "as the water and soil of a place, so too are its people" encompasses this dual interpretation, for like a native born to a place, the newcomer, after being transplanted in and nourished by its soil and water, may eventually become one of its people.

In the case of Chinese Muslims, this interplay between ancestral and naturalized ties has been especially complicated. Their origins, in terms of ancestry, are remote and diverse, both temporally and geographically. Furthermore, their placement within China has likewise been widespread and staggered over history, with some groups arriving earlier than others and settling in different places. Muslims often have been perceived as "foreigners" by their non-Muslim neighbors, even after centuries of life in China have proved their residence there to be anything but temporary. In their own assimilation to Chinese ways they have paradoxically maintained a very "Chinese" longing for their ancestral home (often remembered mythically as Mecca or Arabia, even when their ancestors may have come from elsewhere in the Muslim world), as well as a local attachment to their respective

native places within China. In this context, Lipman's coinage of the term "familiar strangers" to describe the status of Muslims in China is quite apt.

Despite Liu Zhi's reference to Tianfang as the "center of the world" and the ancestral home of all humankind,³⁹ in his many biographical statements he never made explicit mention of his family's specific ancestral origins outside of China. In this regard, he is unlike Wang Daiyu (ca. 1570–1658), another Nanjing native, who boasted that his ancestors were from "Arabia"⁴⁰ before arriving in China in the Yuan period (1279–1368),⁴¹ or the Yunnanese Ma Zhu, who claimed direct descent from the Prophet Muḥammad. Liu Zhi saw the most distant roots of all life, and the universal truth of Islam, in remote Arabia, yet he saw his own proximal roots as firmly planted in Chinese soil. Mentioning his hometown in his writings with apparent pride, he most often referred to Nanjing by its ancient name, Jinling, thereby showing reverence to the local tradition and the Chinese half of his dual heritage.

The early Muslim arrivals of the Tang dynasty (618–906) were spread through various parts of China, mostly taking root in urban enclaves. Later, under the Mongol policy of importing administrators from their other domains, including Islamic regions, to serve in the Yuan dynasty bureaucracy, a new wave of Muslims appeared in China. In the subsequent period, "[b]ased on the wide distribution of Muslims in China under the Yuan, the evolution of the Sino-phone Muslims during the succeeding Ming dynasty took place in a bewildering variety of contexts."⁴² The distinctiveness of these diverse contexts calls for "careful research, which must be *local* rather than generalized."⁴³ One of these many contexts in which Chinese Muslims found themselves was Nanjing and the greater Jiangnan region in which it is located.⁴⁴ Liu Zhi's native home is where our story begins, the history of the city providing an essential background to the understanding of his work.

Long before Liu Zhi was born, Nanjing had been an important city in China's history. Its geographical position provided a temperate climate and fertile conditions for agriculture and silk cultivation, leading to a large population and economic prosperity. The city thus became strategically important and was made the royal capital of numerous states before the founder of the Ming dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang (1328–1398), made it his imperial capital in 1377. It was as the capital of the new Ming empire that Nanjing served as the political, economic, and cultural center of China. The surrounding Jiangnan region had long been a hub for intellectual activity, serving as the principal region for book production and printing in China and as a haven for diverse religious institutions and philosophical traditions. Therefore, even when the Yongle emperor (r. 1403–1424) officially moved the capital to Beijing, reducing Nanjing's political importance, Nanjing retained its status as magnet for literati of various intellectual bents.

When Matteo Ricci sought to expand the Jesuit mission beyond southern China, he resided for a time in Nanjing, hoping to attract many of the city's cultural elite to Catholicism. In the process, he became a prominent feature in the local social scene, while at the same time his efforts introduced Western, Christian ideas to the already rich religio-philosophical milieu. In time, Nanjing's sizeable, centuries-old Muslim community also added their views to the city's cosmopolitan intellectual discourse. Living in the most literate and literary region of China, most local Muslims were by the Ming period highly acculturated, many of them having been trained in the Confucian educational system. Within this population were teachers and students of Islam, as well as wealthy patrons, who played a significant role in the evolution of the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. The Jiangnan region would eventually become the source of "virtually all of the figures involved in the production of Chinese Islamic books,"⁴⁵ with Nanjing developing into the pre-eminent center of Chinese Islamic intellectual activity. It is for this reason that Liu Zhi's "location in Nanjing put him at the very centermost hub of scholarly activity in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries."⁴⁶

A generation before Liu Zhi was born, however, the fortunes of Nanjing, and indeed the entire Chinese empire, were profoundly altered. In June of 1645, the Manchus captured Nanjing, ending centuries of Ming rule there and signaling the ascendancy of the new Qing dynasty in China's cultural capital. The Manchu invasion was a source of humiliation for the conquered populace, and the transition between the Ming and Qing dynasties created a period of grave uncertainty for them. This national crisis did not leave Nanjing unscathed, but the Jiangnan region generally, due to its economic and cultural vibrancy, was able to emerge from the cataclysm in better condition than most other parts of China.

The ability of the Jiangnan region to recover relatively quickly from the social, political, economic, and cultural upheaval of the Manchu invasion allowed Nanjing to maintain its status as one of the pre-eminent cities in the new Qing empire. Although the Manchus maintained their capital in Beijing, closer to their ancestral lands north of China, Nanjing and the region around it continued to be an important source of both financial and intellectual capital during the late seventeenth century and through the eighteenth century, as the Qing dynasty reached the height of its power. Not surprisingly, the fortunes of local Muslim scholars, which often paralleled those of the mainstream non-Muslim literati, also reached a high point during this period. The transregional, multigenerational Chinese Muslim scholarly network reached its apogee in the life and work of Liu Zhi, who followed a long line of notable Chinese Muslim scholars native to Nanjing that included such luminaries as Wu Zunqi (1612–1680), Wang Daiyu, Yuan Ruqi, and Liu Sanjie.

TRANSITION, CONSOLIDATION, AND IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION UNDER THE QING DYNASTY

Analyzing the influence of Chinese dynastic factors on the career of Liu Zhi requires us to examine some of the predominant features of the early Qing period. Originating as an alien conquest regime, the Manchu dynasty was keenly aware that it faced major challenges in gaining legitimacy in the eyes of the peoples it had conquered, both Han Chinese and other ethnic groups. Thus, while seeking simultaneous approval from different constituencies, the conquerors also had to resolve fundamental conflicts among groups and institutions, which arose as they established and consolidated their authority. Chinese society underwent a tremendous transition between the fall of the Ming dynasty and the Manchus' attempt to transform their conquest regime into a legitimate imperial dynasty. The new dynasty, particularly under the aegis of the Kangxi emperor, sought to establish hegemony over China and, despite its own foreign origins, to project an image of legitimacy over an ethnically and culturally diverse empire. Thus the early Qing rulers had to strike a delicate political balance between the interests of diverse groups under their rule. They did so by portraying themselves differently to different constituencies both within and beyond China's borders in the hope of promoting an image of universal legitimacy.

The greatest and most persistent hurdle for the dynasty was winning the acceptance of the Han Chinese, especially the elites who remained loyal to the previous dynasty. It was for this reason that the early Qing emperors were all trained in their youth by Confucian tutors and personally embraced aspects of literati culture. Epitomizing this attempt to court the scholar-official class, the Kangxi emperor portrayed himself as a champion of orthodoxy, restoring the Cheng-Zhu school of Neo-Confucianism,⁴⁷ established in the Song dynasty (960–1279), to the status of state ideology, as it had been during the Ming period. The Qing rulers also used propaganda to downplay animosity between the Han Chinese and their Manchu overlords, attempting to portray relations between the two groups as harmonious.⁴⁸

But the Qing rulers also recognized the value of support from various minority groups. To gain this support, the early Qing emperors cultivated images of themselves as leaders congenial to the concerns of different, often competing groups. The Qing court developed different policies for dealing with specific constituencies within the empire, in keeping with what has been described as the Manchu "cosmopolitan" and "ethnic" modes of expressing supremacy.⁴⁹ The "dual foundation" whereby the Qing rulers went about the difficult task of "maintaining the balance between" Chinese and non-Chinese "poles of legitimation" led to a bifurcated identity used by the dynasty to achieve the separate

goals of conquest and consolidation of legitimate power throughout the empire.⁵⁰ The Qing emperor has been described as a universal axis around which his empire revolved, a “figuration of centrality,” and an “integrating center” that radiated power and authority to connect the empire’s disparate constituencies.⁵¹ As a universal ruler, the emperor would absorb within himself aspects of multiple cultures in order to express his sovereignty with equal legitimacy to various ethno-linguistic, political, religious, and ideological constituencies, in their own terms, as a set of “simultaneities” (e.g., Manchu and Chinese, civil and military, Confucian and Buddhist, among others).⁵² These features of the Qing imperium would not reach their fullest expression until the reign of the Qianlong emperor (r. 1736–1796), when the empire expanded into Central Asia and Tibet, thereby encompassing vast territories that were home to even greater ethnic and cultural diversity. However, even in this earlier phase in Qing dynastic history, the Kangxi emperor, having cultivated his image as a Chinese monarch and champion of Confucian orthodoxy, also did not abjure appealing to various religious or philosophical traditions for legitimacy.

The fact that the Qing rulers themselves came from an alien ethnic minority that sought legitimacy within the categories of Chinese culture, while at the same time holding onto a distinct Manchu heritage, is particularly germane to the study of Liu Zhi and the Chinese Muslim literati. The Han Kitāb authors, in some ways emblematic of Chinese Muslims collectively, also negotiated two sides of a dual heritage. We may use the term “simultaneity” to refer to the Chinese Muslim scholars’ identification with both Chinese and Islamic cultures, thus replacing the binary processes of conversion or a minority’s accommodation to or assimilation of the dominant culture.⁵³ It is no coincidence that this notion of simultaneity applies to both the Qing imperial identity and the Chinese Muslim scholars so aptly. Rather, it is an indication of parallel processes whereby the dynasty’s quest for legitimacy and consolidation is reflected in the concurrent negotiation of identity among ethnic and religious minority communities within the empire. Nor was it only minority communities that were affected by Qing-period questions of identity. Their world turned upside down by foreign conquest, the Chinese majority also had major questions of identity to deal with, seeking a way to make sense of how they had become the servants of putatively culturally inferior invaders. Thus the numerical ethnic majority, especially the first few generations under Qing rule, had occasion to re-examine, if not redefine, their identities as well.

The Qing political climate opened a window of opportunity for various communities, among them Chinese Muslims, to express their beliefs and collective identity as being not only unthreatening to Chinese culture and society, but, moreover, completely consonant with the values and doctrines of the dominant

Confucian ideology. The hybrid cultural, religious, and intellectual identity cultivated by the Han Kitāb scholars parallels in many ways the multivalent dynastic identity promoted by the Manchu rulers. The dynastic circumstances under which they were active gave Liu Zhi and the other Chinese Muslim literati a unique historical chance to express their dual Chinese and non-Chinese identity, in other words, their own Chinese Muslim simultaneity.

Early Qing dynasty ethnic policies served as both cause and effect of the Manchus' own efforts at identity construction. The image of universal sovereignty the dynasty promoted relied heavily on a mythology of Manchu origins to project legitimacy. Ben-Dor suggests that "Manchu myths of origin strongly *effected* their own identity, and *affected* a host of identities."⁵⁴ As such, the Qing court's process of identity construction by means of revisionist origin narratives is related to Chinese Muslims' efforts to reconstruct the history of their religious community in China, whereby they portrayed "themselves, and Islam, as harmonious with—and even vital to—the survival of Chinese tradition."⁵⁵ The scholars of the Han Kitāb engaged in this process during the early Qing period, at the precise moment when Manchu rulers were also seeking to explain their origins and identity. This parallelism is an example of how the regime's behavior facilitated and was reflected in the behavior of minority groups among its subjects.

The imprint of the dynasty was also apparent in the manner in which Han Kitāb authors incorporated references to the Kangxi emperor into their writings. Liu Zhi's life and times were most profoundly influenced by the dynastic circumstances of the Kangxi period. His childhood, formative years, and most of his career occurred under that sixty-year-long reign. Liu Zhi had no direct contact with the regime, and traces of any relationship to the throne in his writings are rare.⁵⁶ He did not seek to gain official recognition from the Kangxi emperor, as his Han Kitāb predecessor Ma Zhu had done in the previous generation, though he did follow Ma Zhu in attempting to present his texts to the imperial court.⁵⁷ However, the influence of the Kangxi zeitgeist on the trajectory of Liu Zhi's life is undeniable. The fact that he lived nearly his entire life under the propitious shadow of the Kangxi imperium played an important role in shaping his ideas, as evinced by an implicit appeal for legitimacy that runs through his writings.

CHINESE AND MUSLIM INTELLECTUAL TRENDS

As the culminating figure in the evolution of the Chinese Muslim educational system and scholarly network, Liu Zhi was the product of and heir to multiple strands of intellectual history emerging from both the Chinese and Islamic traditions. Because of the hybrid nature of Chinese Muslim culture, we must search

broadly for the roots of Liu Zhi's thought and writing, not only in specifically Chinese Muslim circles, but also more generally in the intellectual trends of China and the Islamic world. Nevertheless, our emphasis must be on China, for this is where our story takes place, where Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb writers lived and worked. In the context of Chinese intellectual history a wide range of factors influenced the Chinese Muslim scholars in concert with their engagement in the mainstream Confucian culture. To wit, Tu Weiming lists some of the factors that affected Wang Daiyu and that would apply equally to Liu Zhi:

[H]is family, his teachers, the Muslim community in Nanking, Islam in China, the spread of Catholicism in the Confucian intelligentsia, the popularity of Pure Land Buddhism and religious Taoism, the vibrancy of the folk traditions, and a host of non-religious factors all weighed in Wang's educational choice.⁵⁸

To this list, we can certainly add the contributions of the Chinese Jews, whose community in Kaifeng had attracted the attention of Jesuit scholars since Matteo Ricci's initial contact with them. Chinese Jewish writings, especially the stela inscriptions found at the Kaifeng synagogue, were a likely influence upon both Chinese Catholic and Chinese Muslim literature, as a precursor to the translation of monotheism into Chinese, as we shall see later. Yet above all, it was the deep imprint of native Chinese thought and scholasticism that made the work of Chinese Muslim authors more than merely translations of foreign ideas into Chinese; the Han Kitāb were simultaneously works of Islamic doctrine and Chinese literati tradition.

HAN KITĀB ROOTS IN CONFUCIAN SOIL

Liu Zhi, like many of the other Han Kitāb writers, began the study of the Confucian classics at a young age. Confucian doctrine was therefore deeply ingrained in their consciousnesses. Thus, while Islam was their faith and native religious tradition, Confucianism constituted a major part of their native culture. Chinese was their mother tongue, and they were educated in the Confucian curriculum. As is true of any culturally hybrid community, Chinese Muslims did not merely use the language of the mainstream society without the values and categories of that culture utterly penetrating their self-identity and worldview. While Muslim, they were also born participants in Chinese culture, bearers of two native traditions, which functioned simultaneously. The values inculcated by a Muslim upbringing and a Confucian education rendered the project of harmonizing the teachings of Confucius and his followers with the teachings of the Qur'ān and the Prophet

Muḥammad a natural choice for a scholar like Liu Zhi. It is also significant that Liu Zhi was active during a period of classical Confucian re-ascendancy, as the Kangxi emperor reinstated Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism as state orthodoxy. Nevertheless, the influence of the burgeoning *kaozheng* (“evidentiary studies”) movement, which would become ascendant in the second half of the eighteenth century, may also be seen in his and other Chinese Muslim scholars’ writings.⁵⁹ Thus, aspects of the evolving Confucian tradition were reflected in the *Han Kitāb* as the canon itself evolved from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, so much so that one cannot possibly understand this body of literature without acknowledging its debt to the Chinese religio-philosophical tradition in general and Confucianism in particular.

THE THREE TEACHINGS AND SYNCRETISM

The teachings of Confucianism were the unquestioned foundation of religio-philosophical orthodoxy in imperial China. Any other tradition wishing to make inroads in Chinese culture and society had to accommodate itself first to the dominant Confucian paradigm. Daoism and Buddhism constantly negotiated their place in Chinese culture, but were nevertheless considered irredeemably heterodox by the arbiters of Confucian orthodoxy. Even so, these two traditions exerted a profound influence on Chinese culture and society, such that the Confucian establishment had no alternative but to respond to them in its discourse and even accommodate its teachings to some of their popular concepts and practices.⁶⁰ The tendency of Chinese culture to assimilate diverse religio-philosophical systems of belief and practice may be seen as both a cause and an effect of a long tradition of synthesis and syncretism. This tendency strongly influenced the ability of members of foreign religious communities to find their respective niches within the syncretic framework that evolved in China over centuries.

The history of China’s encounter with, and absorption of, foreign cultures and ideas, in addition to contributing to the unique synthetic construction that is Chinese civilization, is also part of the larger mimetic evolution of human civilization as a whole. In the grand scheme of history, language, both lexicon and syntax, has served as a crucial foundation of human thought. Consequently, obstacles presented by language differences among communities have posed a significant problem in the historical encounters between civilizations. Attempts to overcome these difficulties and reach mutual linguistic coherence have produced dynamic syntheses. With respect to the exchange of religious and philosophical concepts from one culture to another, any writer apologizing for a foreign tradition, wanting it to be perceived as civilized, has no choice but to use the language of the host, the dominant cultural idiom. Apologists and missionaries for foreign

traditions in China were thus compelled to employ a particular version of written Chinese to explain their traditions. While we shall briefly examine some of the precursors to the Han Kitāb writers' attempts at cultural translation, we shall later have occasion to examine in greater detail how the problem of translation, specifically of the central tenets of monotheism, posed some of the greatest challenges to Chinese Muslim writers, but also led to the dynamic synthetic religio-philosophical constructions of Liu Zhi.

In the history of China's historical encounters with foreign traditions, Buddhism first found its place alongside Confucianism and Daoism as one of the Three Teachings. Over time, other foreign religions such as Judaism, Manichaeism, Christianity (first Nestorian and later Catholic), and Islam underwent their own respective processes of coming to terms with the main traditions of China. In many ways, these processes mirrored or paralleled each other, especially as later religious communities followed the paths blazed by those that preceded them. They all had in common, however, a need to negotiate with one or more of the Three Teachings, either by way of accommodation to conventions of orthodoxy or by distancing themselves from ideas, individuals, and institutions deemed heterodox. Any discussion of the intellectual and ideological background of Islamic scholarship in China must acknowledge the historical interplay of the Three Teachings and the syncretic tendencies that surrounded them.

The great diversity of religious and philosophical traditions that had characterized Chinese culture since ancient times was augmented by an influx of foreign ideas under the Tang dynasty (618–906). Under the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), when China was linked to the rest of Eurasia as part of the vast territory under Mongol rule, another infusion of foreign traditions occurred. Increased diversity, combined with the long tradition of religious tolerance and syncretism among the Mongols, helped fuel another episode of religio-philosophical synthesis in Yuan China. This in turn set the stage for the flowering of the widespread Three Teachings syncretism movement of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), a period paradoxically marked by intermittent xenophobic protectionist policies as well as an outward-looking cosmopolitanism that permitted the development of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scholarship and literature in Chinese.

HARMONIZATION OF THE “FOURTH TEACHING”

Followers of a number of foreign religions entered and settled in China under different circumstances and with various motivations. Some of them made efforts to naturalize their respective traditions on Chinese soil, with varying degrees of success. A number of these religious traditions came originally from western and Central Asia, entering China with mercantile caravans, along the same trade

routes of the Silk Road that had first brought Buddhism. While there is evidence that this movement of ideas and commodities developed simultaneously with the silk trade as far back as the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), by far the greatest influx of these foreign religious and cultural influences occurred during the early Tang dynasty, an era renowned for its cosmopolitan attitudes. Most notably, among the religions brought by foreign merchants and emissaries were Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism from Iran and Central Asia, Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam.⁶¹ In the thriving port of international maritime trade, Quanzhou, archaeological and historical evidence indicates the existence of places of worship for most of these religious communities, as well as Hindu and Jain temples.⁶² Similar conditions existed in the Tang capitals of Chang'an⁶³ and Luoyang and a handful of other major commercial centers in the country where foreigners lived in urban enclaves. Of these many sects and religions represented in earlier times, only Islam survives with a significant community of believers in China today.

The majority of the early representatives of these foreign religions came to China not as professional missionaries, but as merchants and political emissaries hoping to secure favorable trade relations. Their religious beliefs and practices were simply elements of their cultural baggage, which they carried along with them incidentally as they traveled and traded. This is not to say that followers of these foreign religions did not share their beliefs if invited to do so by curious Chinese audiences, for such exchanges certainly did occur, and they account for the introduction of legends and mythological motifs from a variety of non-Chinese traditions into popular Chinese folklore.⁶⁴ However, the primary motivation of these Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Nestorians, Jews, and Muslims was not to win converts among the Chinese, but rather to transact and coexist peacefully with them, to find new opportunities, or in some cases to escape religious persecution in other lands. In this way, they differed from the Buddhist monks who accompanied commercial caravans with the ambition of spreading their faith to foreign lands. Not until the later arrival of European Catholic missionaries would China again witness such intense proselytizing efforts. The history of Catholicism in China culminated in the arrival of the Jesuits, whose missionaries and Chinese converts were active participants in the religio-philosophical discourse of the late Ming–early Qing period. This of course placed them chronologically in a position to interact with, and quite possibly influence, Chinese Muslim scholars.

The ways in which different foreign religious communities in China dealt with the pressures to assimilate for the sake of survival, and yet hold onto their religious and cultural distinctness, contain certain identifiable patterns of common experience. Within these general patterns, no two groups had identical experiences, and the similarities between them may be mapped along an imaginary sliding scale measuring the degrees of assimilation and resistance to assimilation they

demonstrated. Factors influencing movement along this spectrum would have to include the historical circumstances of each religion's entry into China, whether it was transmitted "organically" by trade, or whether religious professionals on proselytizing missions played a role, and how large a role such clerics played. Another important consideration in graphing these historical trajectories would be how much contact the foreign religion's transplanted adherents and their descendants maintained with the religion's traditional homeland beyond the borders of China. Such contact helped bolster some communities longer than others, providing the vitalizing influx of new ideas over succeeding generations.

While Chinese culture has generally been considered fairly tolerant of foreign religio-philosophical influences, it has nevertheless also been chauvinistically protective of its indigenous traditions. Any faith or philosophy that would establish itself in China, whether as a community or a mission, would have to confront this reality and adapt, accommodate, and/or harmonize itself with native beliefs, practices, and institutions, particularly those of Confucianism. Buddhism, the foreign religion to naturalize most successfully in China, both accommodated itself to the Confucian context and syncretized itself with Daoist metaphysics. It was thus able to find its niche, ultimately standing alongside the two indigenous traditions as the third among the Three Teachings. Every other foreign religion that arrived in China subsequently would have to negotiate its own space in relation to each of these three traditions and later with the syncretic triune of the Sanjiao.

Some foreign religious communities posited their faith, tacitly or explicitly, as a "Fourth Teaching" or hoped to supplant all other contenders to the position of Confucianism's companion tradition.⁶⁵ Their proponents did so by arguing that their tradition was derived from the same ultimate source as the Confucian teachings, namely the "Way of the ancients." Proponents of the various foreign traditions thus frequently mirrored and influenced each other's methods even as they vied for position and survival in China. It is therefore no coincidence, for example, that during the late Ming and early Qing periods, the writings of Jesuit and Chinese Christian apologists resemble in so many ways the works of the Chinese Muslim Han Kitāb authors. All these players were engaged, often simultaneously, in the complex and multifaceted social, intellectual, and spiritual discourse of the times, and all were obsessed with coming to terms with Confucian China, defining themselves in terms of its literati traditions.

ISLAM IN CHINA

Islam arrived in China during the Tang dynasty, carried with the caravan trade along the overland Silk Road from the West, via maritime trade from the Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea, and Indian Ocean to southeastern Chinese coastal cities, and

on horseback by military mercenaries, who fought in skirmishes along China's western frontiers. Muslims also came to the Tang empire on diplomatic missions sent by various caliphs of both the Umayyad (661–650) and 'Abbāsīd (751–1238) dynasties. The foundations of the Muslim population of China were laid by some of these early arrivals, who settled in Chinese cities, intermarried with Chinese women, and established permanent Islamic enclaves in various parts of the country. But Islam, as the religion and culture of the early settlers, remained a distinctly foreign entity in China, kept apart from the mainstream of Han Chinese society by the differences of language, custom, and faith. Of course, the ideal of the Confucian meritocracy assured the possibility that some foreigners who were willing and able to acculturate could find a place, even elite status, in Tang society. Yet even if they could overcome cultural obstacles, the fact that most Muslim immigrants to China were engaged in commerce automatically placed them at the bottom of a Confucian social hierarchy that disdained merchants. This economic reality, perhaps more than Chinese xenophobia, excluded most Muslims from elite status in the aristocratic Tang society. Thus, even after generations of residence in China whereby the descendants of early Muslim sojourners rose to the status of *wushi fanke*, or fifth-generation foreigners, even their more naturalized presence in China was still perceived as foreign.

The arrival of foreign Muslims continued into the Song period, made up particularly of Muslim immigrants seeking economic opportunity or refuge from political turbulence in the Islamic world. The influx of Muslims from western and Central Asia during the Song dynasty included individuals from prominent Muslim families, who settled in China, amassed fortunes, and even rose to positions of power in government. Yet even with the inroads made by Tang *wushi fanke* communities and the Muslim families naturalized during the Song period, and the participation of Muslims in various areas of Chinese society, Islam in China had yet to be sinicized and thus remained an outsider phenomenon, stigmatized by a sense of foreignness.

The establishment of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) linked China with the vast Eurasian Mongol empire. This multinational and multiethnic empire encompassed all of Central Asia and parts of the Middle East and therefore contained a large Muslim population. The Mongol policy of bringing in soldiers and bureaucrats from their distant domains to preside over local conquered peoples meant that Muslims were imported to serve the Yuan government as civil and military administrators in China. Muslim administrators played an important role in the incorporation of frontier regions, such as the southwestern province of Yunnan, into the Yuan domains. Mongol policy placed Muslims in the Semu class of a social hierarchy divided along ethnic lines.⁶⁶ This status allowed certain prominent Muslims to rise to positions of considerable power and wealth under

Mongol rule. The political climate also drew large numbers of Muslims from the Mongols' western territories to China, where they sought economic opportunity, often settling among the Muslim communities that already existed there or pioneering the settlement of frontier territories. For the most part, Mongol policies of religious tolerance afforded Muslims in China a significant degree of autonomy in the administration of their own communities. Thus while the Muslim population of Yuan China grew, both in size and prosperity, it largely continued to function separately from Han Chinese society and retained its foreign stigma in the eyes of most Chinese subjects.

When the founder of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) overthrew the Mongols and restored native rule to China, one might have predicted a government backlash against Muslims, many of whom had actively participated in the Yuan regime. This never happened. The early Ming emperors were wary of Mongols living in China and exiled the majority of the former ruling elite to the other side of the Great Wall, but members of other ethnic groups who had served in the Yuan administration were retained. Thus Muslim military officers, architects, astronomers, and engineers, among others, played an important role in helping build the Ming empire. Imperial patronage notwithstanding, however, popular resentment of Muslims among the Han Chinese majority, which had existed since the Tang dynasty and only grew in bitterness as the result of Muslim collaboration with the Mongols, reached dangerous heights.

The Ming rulers, hoping to defuse the potential for ethnic strife, therefore enacted policies intended to accelerate the “civilization” of “barbarian” minorities, including laws to help accelerate the natural process of acculturation of various ethnic and cultural communities. The daily force and inevitability of acculturative processes had certainly shaped the history of the Muslim community in China even before the Ming period, but never before had a regime taken such concrete steps to oversee Muslim assimilation into mainstream Chinese culture and society. While the widespread adoption of Chinese language and material culture by Muslims living in eastern and central China would have occurred anyway, the Ming policies certainly catalyzed a more rapid naturalization that helped transform Islam in China into Chinese Islam.

Yet we must not oversimplify a complex history by reducing the evolution of Chinese Muslim social position and cultural identity to the product of external political forces. While Ming policies clearly played a significant role in, and likely accelerated, this process, they were not the only reason behind the social and cultural transformation of Muslims. Multiple and nuanced internal factors and pressures within the multifaceted Muslim community must also be acknowledged as a major impetus for this transformation. And, as we have seen, predictable patterns of assimilation, to which any minority community is subject, must be considered

as well. Indeed, the regime's policies may have been responsive to these factors as much as it helped to produce them. Furthermore, the social benefits this transformation brought about ought not be viewed merely as outcomes of the regime's policies. In fact, the order of cause and effect could even be reversed, such that the social benefits created by natural patterns of assimilation were also triggers of further transformation, and this transformation helped fuel Ming policy initiatives. This may help explain why "assimilatory" tendencies among Muslims continued even under the subsequent Qing dynasty, when a completely different type of empire, with quite a different political agenda, emerged.

Whatever the cause or effect of the social benefits enjoyed by Muslims in Ming China, we should bear in mind that benefiting its Muslim subjects was not a priority nor a direct objective of the dynasty. It was instead the result of a domestic policy based primarily on foreign policy concerns. The Ming regime's assimilation laws may be attributed to the dynasty's focus on the re-sinicization of China after a century of foreign rule under the Mongols. The Ming government sought to define and secure Chinese identity and patrimony via methods that, at least under the reign of several Ming emperors, verged on protectionism, if not outright xenophobia. That is not to say, however, that the three-hundred-year Ming dynasty was monolithic or consistent in its worldview. The dynasty's founder, Ming Taizu (r. 1368–1398), was erratic in his policies concerning "foreigners" in general, including Muslims; while tolerant, even solicitous at times, of Muslims in the realm, the emperor nevertheless also limited his empire's contacts abroad. By contrast, his son, the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424), was incredibly outward-looking in his perspective and actually reversed most of his father's policies toward Muslims. We must recall that he also commissioned the famous treasure fleet, under the command of the Muslim admiral Zheng He (1371–1433), to make seven voyages of exploration to expand Ming trade, prestige, and contact with the then-known world. Through much of the period, though, a more inward-looking foreign policy greatly reduced Chinese contact with the outside world, including Islamic Central Asia. One of the effects of such policy was to cut Muslims off from their own cultural hearth in the central lands of Islam, leaving them to negotiate their way amid a vast non-Muslim majority with little support or influence from outside China.

By the sixteenth century, many among the highly sinicized Muslim communities of central and eastern China pursued a classical Confucian education that could enable them to take the official examination, a means to social advancement. Chinese had become the mother tongue of assimilated Muslims, and a significant portion of this population was also literate in classical Chinese. By contrast, Arabic and Persian had dwindled in use among these Muslims, except for the liturgical Arabic used in daily rituals by those families who kept up their religious observances. For these purposes, rudimentary instruction in the Islamic

languages, for the purposes of fulfilling basic ritual obligations, was often given to Muslim children at informal schools in local community mosques. There were, however, some Muslims in central and eastern China who were concerned about the possible erosion, or even disappearance, of Islamic knowledge and identity that accompanied assimilation.

One such individual was Hu Dengzhou (1522–1597), who had been educated in his youth in the Confucian curriculum but who craved a deeper understanding of Islam than was available from the mosque school he attended as a child in Shaanxi. Realizing that such learning was impossible to find in China, and with the flow of ideas and people from the Islamic world curtailed by Ming foreign policy, Hu Dengzhou did what few others in his time dared. He traveled for years through Central Asia, and eventually to Mecca, seeking instruction and Islamic texts he could bring back with him to China. Upon returning to China, he undertook the reform of existing mosque-based education and instituted a new system, which combined traditional Islamic and local Chinese elements, rooted in Chinese soil, but fertilized by a fresh infusion of knowledge from the Muslim heartlands.

Known as *Jingtang Jiaoyu* (literally, “Scripture Hall Education”), Hu Dengzhou’s innovations included the expansion of the curriculum to include newly introduced Arabic and Persian texts, which required more intensive language instruction than had previously been standard in Chinese Muslim schools. He also implemented the practice of training teachers who could then go out to communities in different locales to train others in the new curriculum and pedagogy. In so doing, Hu Dengzhou laid the foundations of the scholarly network that would blossom at the end of the Ming period. Perhaps the greatest innovation of the *Jingtang Jiaoyu* system devised by Hu Dengzhou was the introduction of Chinese texts into the Islamic classroom. In the early days of the educational system, Islamic texts were scarce, so Hu Dengzhou and his followers translated those they had into classical Chinese. Eventually, this practice led to the production of a sizeable Chinese Islamic curriculum and the gradual blending of Confucian and Islamic ideas that would gain its fullest expression in the *Han Kitāb*. As the educational system, curriculum, and burgeoning scholarly network grew in sophistication, the teachers and students took on the appearance of a true subclass of Chinese literati, which eventually gave rise to individuals who would write the *Han Kitāb*, the production of which began with literal translations of Islamic texts into Chinese. From these modest beginnings, the scope and breadth of the *Han Kitāb* evolved eventually to encompass commentaries and comprehensive treatises, including the original works of scholars like Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi.

CHAPTER 2

CHINESE MUSLIM TRADITION AND LIU ZHI'S LEGACY

With the formation and spread of the Jingtang Jiaoyu educational reforms came the demand for texts to fill out the new curriculum. Previously, the founder of the nascent educational system, Hu Dengzhou, had been driven by the scarcity of texts to venture away from his hometown, and eventually outside China, in search of Islamic knowledge. Specifically, he felt that Chinese Muslim communities lacked texts and methods for teaching Muslims like himself whose mother tongue was Chinese. The loss of ability among most Chinese Muslims to understand Arabic and Persian had effectively cut the majority off from the printed sources that were available, and it meant that even those who could read the Qur'ān did so with little comprehension of its meaning. The experiences of the pioneering Hu Dengzhou served as the template for the generations of Chinese Muslim teachers and students who followed, and from that template came the development of a curriculum, pedagogy, corpus of literature, and a scholarly identity.

Among the first steps in this progression was the translation by Hu Dengzhou and his immediate followers of Islamic texts brought to China. This translation phase in the development of Islamic education and scholarship in China was a response to the need for a curriculum for sinophone Muslims. The translation of Islamic literature into classical Chinese had the secondary effect of introducing Confucian language into Chinese Islamic discourse. With the introduction of the Confucian literary idiom came an infusion of Chinese religio-philosophical terms and the concepts they expressed. And thus, through the process of translation and explication using Chinese, sinicized Muslims began the process of merging

Confucian and Islamic thought, which later culminated in the original works of the Han Kitāb writers.

This evolution toward harmonization was not free from complexity and disjunction. As they reconciled the two sides of their dual heritage, Chinese Muslim scholars struggled to maintain a sense of honoring tradition even as they embarked on an enterprise that required significant innovation. Both the Chinese and Islamic traditions have long histories of syncretizing foreign elements. Syncretism is an inherently innovative process insofar as its product represents a synthesis and therefore something new and different from the elements that combined to create it. But despite syncretic precedents, both Islam and Confucianism assert a pristine transmission of tradition and dogmatically reject the introduction of innovative thought to the teachings of their founders. Inheriting this internal paradox from two sides, Chinese Islamic syncretism is therefore an exponentially complicated reality.

LIU ZHI'S CLASSICAL INHERITANCE

Wang Daiyu, Ma Zhu, and Liu Zhi are frequently grouped together as the luminaries of Han Kitāb literary production. They are lauded as authors of important original texts, whose work may be considered to represent the next stage in the evolution of the canon after the translation-commentary phase of the late sixteenth through mid-seventeenth centuries. Yet these three authors also inherited directly from their translating predecessors, such that one could argue that their writings were but a continuation of the translation-commentary enterprise and that little of what they wrote may be termed “original” in the modern sense. Of course, the premium placed nowadays on “originality” in research and composition was not generally present in classical intellectual traditions, including those of Islam and Confucianism. To the contrary, antiquity conferred authority, and direct derivation from historical antecedents gave later scholarship its legitimacy. Conversely, claims that something was the “original” product of an individual writer’s own mind were met with mistrust, if not outright condemnation.

Islam has long maintained a circumspect attitude toward “innovation” in religious matters. An oft-cited Ḥadīth commands Muslims to adhere unrelentingly to the tradition of Muḥammad and his righteous successors and warns them to beware of novel doctrines or practices that lead the faithful away from the right path and toward hell.¹ And, as the Qur’ān affirms that its message is not an invention of Muḥammad’s mind, it commands the Prophet to proclaim, “I am not an innovator among the Messengers . . . I follow only what is revealed to me.”² The Confucian tradition had similarly claimed its authority from the “ancients.” Confucius did not consider himself to be the originator of his teachings,

but claimed to be merely a transmitter of and commentator on the teachings of his eminent forebears, as we recall his famous dictum in the *Lunyu* to that effect.³ In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, scholars within the Confucian tradition led a backlash against what they considered the unduly speculative nature of Song-Ming Neo-Confucian orthodoxy, calling for a return to ancient texts. Thus, as Chinese Muslims were implementing educational reforms and entering a period of prolific literary output, they did so against the backdrop of the *kaozheng* (“evidentiary studies”) literati movement, which advocated a return to the oldest available textual sources and commentary traditions as the basis for legitimate scholarship. In this way, Chinese Muslim scholars found ample precedent on both sides of their dual intellectual heritage to adhere to the time-honored tradition of derivative scholarship and to eschew “originality.” Their insistence on the notion of preserving and transmitting received tradition, and the rejection of claims of innovation, thus linked Liu Zhi and his fellow Han Kitāb writers to a series of conservative trends in both the Islamic and Chinese orthodox traditions.

This attitude is evident in the work of the Chinese Muslim scholars instrumental in the Jingtang educational reforms and Han Kitāb literary production. They consciously promoted educational reforms and a literary corpus that defied conventions by merging Islamic beliefs with Confucian concepts and terminology. Yet they nevertheless made explicit and frequent reference to the fact that they were transmitters of a Teaching (*jiao*) and Way (*dao*) as ancient as humankind itself.⁴ It was not their aim to invent new doctrines, although their opponents often accused them of doing just that. While conservative critics claimed that the introduction of Chinese language and ideas to the explication of Islam was potentially corruptive, the Chinese Muslim literati defended their commitment to translation as an indispensable tool for transmitting Islamic knowledge in China. The scholars regarded translation and interpretation through the medium of Confucian concepts as nothing more than a method for passing orthodox beliefs and values onto future generations of sinophone Muslims, and they rejected any claim by traditionalists that they were changing or reinventing Islam.

Liu Zhi was quite deliberate in his efforts to establish legitimacy through reference to authoritative sources and antecedents. For instance, in his “Author’s Preface” (*Zi xu*) to the *Tianfang dianli* he explained that his book is actually a compendium of a much more voluminous work on Islamic ritual, a translation (from some unknown Islamic source) first undertaken by his father. Thus, Liu Zhi paid homage to the tradition of translation he had inherited from the previous generation: “I have undertaken to carry on the will of my late father by translating the book on the ritual law of Islam completely.”⁵

In his “Introduction” (*liyān*), Liu Zhi reaffirmed that the *Tianfang dianli* is a work of translation, and he reinforced the notion that he was only following

established traditions and literary conventions. After briefly describing the format and content of the book, Liu Zhi referred to his sources, namely Chinese and Islamic “classics.” He admitted to “selecting and gathering, compiling and editing” various Islamic classics in the process of transmitting them to his audience.⁶ But this, after all, is nothing more or less than Confucius had claimed. This portrayal is also consistent with Muḥammad’s assertion that the revelation he imparted was only a modified reiteration of previous revelations sent to earlier prophets, a notion that Liu Zhi emphasized in his chapter on the origins of Islam.⁷

Reaffirming the notion that his work was based on tradition and was not merely his own individual invention, Liu Zhi wrote, “I did not presume to penetrate the work with personal opinion, nor did I dare to mix and insert miscellaneous matters in it.”⁸ After explaining the methodology behind his use of translation and transliteration, he anticipated and pre-emptively defended himself against claims that he was deviating in any way from the canonical sources. He counteracted such criticism by suggesting that his would-be critics were the ones in need of correction and that his orthodox book provides just that: “Gentle reader, do not consider that I am opposing the classics and deviating from custom. To the contrary, this book opposes misguided customs by conforming to the classics, and that is all.”⁹

The use of allusive terminology in the titles of his books, as well as in the body of their texts, illustrates Liu Zhi’s attempt to show himself as a guardian and perpetuator of classical traditions, while the thorough synthesis of Chinese and Islamic elements in his writing continued along a path of conservative innovation, in the footsteps of previous generations of Chinese Muslim thinkers. A prime example is his use of the term *dianli* in the title of his book on Islamic ritual law, the *Tianfang dianli*. One can explain Liu Zhi’s choice of this term on the basis of its literal sense as “ceremonies and rituals.” But there is certainly more to it than that. In his introduction to the book, Liu Zhi cited his source of inspiration: a work translated and/or written by his father, about which he stated, “[o]riginally, there was a complete book (or compendium) on ritual law.”¹⁰ In continuing his father’s work, he could simply have used the same literal terminology his father had used to describe Islamic ritual law, namely *lifa*. But Liu Zhi opted for a more sophisticated title to his adaptation of Liu Sanjie’s research, one which both indicated his own erudition and placed the work, and Islam, within the boundaries of Confucian classicism. He chose the term *dianli*, which has its *locus classicus* in the *Yijing*¹¹ and which, through the centuries, became synonymous with the concept of ritual etiquette, the binding agent of Chinese social order. In classical Islamic thought, ritual practices often also have a strong social component, but are primarily seen as methods of worship and service to God. By choosing the term *dianli* for the title of his book, Liu Zhi linked the devotional piety of Islam

with the eminently social rites of Confucianism, a tradition in which questions of spiritual efficacy are typically downplayed. Liu Zhi's deliberate lexical choices show him straddling a thin line between tradition and innovation as he employed classical allusion to cast a new light on the Chinese study of Islam.

“ORIGINALITY”: LIU ZHI'S DEPARTURE FROM TRADITION

Liu Zhi's literary productivity alone would distinguish him among Han Kitāb scholars, but the quality of his writing also raised the level of Islamic scholarship in China to new heights. His books were by far the most systematic of the entire Han Kitāb corpus in terms of their methodology. Liu Zhi divided each of his books into distinct sections dealing with various aspects of Islamic belief and practice, and he similarly divided his body of work into categories and genres that he saw as components of a grand project to explicate Islam in its nuanced entirety, making his work arguably the most comprehensive treatment of Islam written in Chinese before the modern period.

Departing from earlier conventions, or progressing beyond their parameters, Liu Zhi's thought stands out as the most “Chinese” (i.e., Confucianized) of the Han Kitāb literature, and it was in fact recognized as such by prominent non-Muslim Confucians of his day. Furthermore, although he was sometimes quite critical of other religious and philosophical teachings, Liu Zhi's purview was certainly the most panoptic of the entire Han Kitāb corpus in that he addressed virtually every other major tradition in the Chinese cultural landscape—not only the Three Teachings, but also Judaism and Christianity. It would therefore be fair to say that of all the Han Kitāb scholars Liu Zhi went the furthest in bringing Islam into the larger Chinese intellectual discourse of the period. In the process, he built the most extensive conceptual links between Islam and other traditions.

There is no question that Liu Zhi both saw himself and was viewed by others as a continuation of the Chinese Muslim traditions that preceded him. Indeed, as we have seen above, many of the linguistic, stylistic, and conceptual choices he made in his writing reflect his simultaneous reverence for both the Islamic and Confucian traditions and a conscious attempt to show himself as faithful to this dual heritage. But Liu Zhi also took positions outside the conventional framework of established tradition. In some ways, Liu Zhi even surpassed his innovative predecessors Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu in the degree of “originality” he brought to Chinese Muslim scholarship.

The same body of work that demonstrates Liu Zhi's adherence to tradition also contains evidence to illustrate how Liu Zhi departed, sometimes quite self-consciously, from certain traditions even as he carried on others. For example,

Liu Zhi's work of Arabic orthography and philology, the *Tianfang zimu jieyi* (Explaining the Meaning of Arabic Letters), demonstrates his exploration beyond the established themes and genres of the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum and earlier Han Kitāb texts. This work was his contribution to the study of Islamic languages, which was an essential component of Chinese Muslim education. However, unlike the standard grammar texts, lexicons, and dictionaries employed in Jingtang Jiaoyu schools, this book, five thousand characters in length, delves deeper and into much more abstract territory. In this book, Liu Zhi interpreted the origin and meaning of the twenty-eight letters of the Arabic alphabet from a religious, metaphysical, and philosophical point of view.¹²

TRADITIONAL AND INNOVATIVE SOURCES

As we track Liu Zhi's diverse ideas, we are naturally led to an examination of his sources, in which we can see clearly his roots in the "orthodox" literature of both the Islamic and Confucian traditions. Yet among the works he cited there are also a number of sources that are regarded as residing outside the two "orthodox" canons. Like Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu before him, Liu Zhi admitted Sufi texts into his bibliographies and frequently alluded to Daoist and Buddhist literature. Previous writers of "original" Han Kitāb books employed terminology and concepts from the extracanonical, or heterodox, literary traditions where and when it suited their arguments. Liu Zhi also did so, and he appears to have exceeded his predecessors in the quantity of such sources he cited.

It must be noted here that the distinction between orthodoxy and heterodoxy in both Chinese and Islamic civilization, as in cultures around the world, has always been fluid. Ideas deemed heterodox by one generation may, by the forces of attrition and attraction, come to be absorbed into the mainstream tradition, only to become part of the orthodoxy of another generation. Factions within a single tradition may also debate, even battle, over the definition of orthodoxy. Conservative factions, or revivers of an older vision of orthodoxy, may eschew as heterodox ideas that had already previously been subsumed within the tradition. In Confucian China, "heterodox" teachings of Daoism and Buddhism had been assimilated into the tradition in the great synthetic movements of the Han and then Song dynasties, even as the rhetoric that deemed them heretical persisted. So diffuse in the greater Chinese culture were Daoist and Buddhist ideas that some of the great masters of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism were accused by their detractors of making excessive concessions to the heterodoxy, or even being Daoists and Buddhists disguised in Confucian robes.¹³ These men were defenders of Confucian orthodoxy even though they were influenced by non-Confucian ideas that proliferated at all levels of the society around them.

Similarly, in the Islamic world, various teachings collectively subsumed under the title “Sufi” had numerous detractors even as throngs of Muslims were drawn to them. The diffusion of Sufi ideas and practices was so thorough that even famous Muslim critics of Sufism, such as Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328) or his ideological heir Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb (1703–1792), had themselves studied under Sufi teachers. The claim has been made that Sufi teachings were so widespread that, in terms of being influenced by these ideas, by the eighteenth century *all* Muslims were Sufis. Certainly by the time of Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb writers who included mystical texts among their Islamic sources, Sufism, while perhaps extracanonical, was as “orthodox” as any anti-Sufi tradition. Thus, while Liu Zhi’s use of certain texts may have offended the sensibilities of some of his most conservative critics, his syncretism of diverse ideas and use of a wide range of sources had precedents in the traditions of both sides of his dual heritage.

CHINESE SOURCES

Liu Zhi’s use of diverse texts led some Confucians and Muslims to question the orthodoxy of his work. From the Chinese perspective, Liu Zhi quoted liberally from the various canons of the Three Teachings, including reference to Buddhist and Daoist ideas deemed “heterodox” by the Confucian establishment. In fact, in his introduction to the *Tianfang dianli*, he explicitly stated that the book was written for “the reader who thoroughly understands and practices the Three Teachings, but has never known the rites of our Teaching [i.e., Islam].”¹⁴ Other Chinese Muslim writers had alluded to, or even explicitly mentioned, the Three Teachings before, but never in so positive a tone.¹⁵ Liu Zhi’s brief reference to the Three Teachings conveys a view consistent with the largely conciliatory religio-philosophical discourse of the period, especially in cosmopolitan Nanjing, where the syncretic trend was firmly entrenched.

Liu Zhi’s reference to the Three Teachings also signaled his willingness to accept the collected literature of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism as potential sources for promoting his own theories and arguments. From this position, Liu Zhi could still maintain the established Chinese Muslim scholarly approach of aligning Islam conceptually and ethically with Confucianism and criticizing elements of Buddhism and Daoism as heterodox. But he could also draw upon these “heretical” traditions for terminology to express analogous concepts in Islam as it suited his needs. Certain metaphysical concepts originally derived from Daoism or Buddhism, often filtered through centuries of Neo-Confucian philosophy, would prove especially useful to him in attempts to expound Islamic theology in Chinese, as we shall see later.

Liu Zhi’s willingness to use concepts drawn from all of the major Chinese

religious and philosophical schools would not have seemed contradictory to him nor to those of his readers versed in the discourse of late Ming–early Qing period Three Teachings syncretism. In this context, his statement in the introduction makes sense as a disclaimer intended to deflect potential criticism from less open-minded readers, especially among more conservative, parochial Chinese Muslims. Reference to the Three Teachings would not have raised many eyebrows among the majority of mainstream Chinese literati so long as Liu Zhi could also demonstrate, as he did, that Islam was more in agreement with Confucianism than with either Daoism or Buddhism. Indeed, Liu Zhi's erudition showed him to have been “in dialogue not simply with Chinese Muslim scholarship, but with literary traditions of other Chinese communities as well.”¹⁶ His ability to demonstrate his broad knowledge of various philosophical schools and religious teachings earned him respect from scholarly readers, both Muslim and, perhaps more significantly, non-Muslim.

Liu Zhi's co-option of ideas from diverse sources was an asset rather than a liability in the impression it made on most of his readers because it had precedents within both the Confucian and Islamic traditions. It recalled the co-option of Daoist and Buddhist concepts by the Song and Ming dynasty Neo-Confucian masters, whose philosophical lineage represented state orthodoxy for the better part of six hundred years. From an Islamic perspective, Liu Zhi's methodology was also reminiscent of the work of the medieval *mutakallimūn*, Muslim theologians who labored to reconcile elements of Hellenistic philosophy with the Qur'ānic revelation. Liu Zhi's willingness to employ the wide variety of sources at his disposal might appear to his more conservative critics as an excessively liberal approach, but his methods remained consistent with the best traditions of Confucianism and Islam, the latter expressed in the Ḥadīth: “The word of wisdom is the lost treasure of the believer, and so he has the truest claim to it wherever he finds it.”¹⁷

Liu Zhi took this notion of valid sources to great lengths, leading him to treat the texts of multiple traditions, including rival schools of thought within those traditions, as fodder for citation in support of his ideas. For example, under the general rubric of Confucian literature, Liu Zhi did not discriminate between the canons of the Six Classics and the Four Books on the one hand and the speculative philosophy of later Neo-Confucian thinkers on the other. This stands in contrast to the strategy employed by Ricci, who sought Christian accommodation with the “natural religion” of the ancient classics and the teachings of “primitive” Confucianism, but eschewed Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, which he viewed as having been corrupted by accretions of Buddhist and Daoist concepts. Liu Zhi made no such distinction, thereby freeing himself to cite all sorts of Confucian literature, including the aforementioned canonical books as well as the writings of Xunzi (ca. 310–237 BCE), Han Yu (768–824), the Cheng brothers (Cheng Hao,

1032–1085, and Cheng Yi, 1033–1107), Zhu Xi (1130–1200), and Lu Xiangshan (1139–1192), among others. That some of these thinkers and their later exponents often clashed with each other did not deter him from including their writings in his bricolage of sources and ideas.

If Liu Zhi did not discriminate between factions and schools within the greater Confucian tradition, he certainly would not have distinguished between such divisions among Daoists or Buddhists. As described above, his use of concepts taken from the non-Confucian and non-Islamic traditions was intended to serve one of two possible purposes. In some cases, he co-opted certain of their terms or concepts that had already been naturalized into the syncretic Chinese religio-philosophical discourse, and were therefore no longer specifically Daoist or Buddhist, in order to express a corresponding Islamic tenet. In other instances, he referred directly to beliefs or practices of Daoism or Buddhism, citing their discordance with both Confucian and Muslim ideas of orthodoxy, in order to highlight the distance between Islam and the “heterodoxies” reviled by Confucianism.

Liu Zhi’s use of Buddhist and Daoist ideas for comparison and contrast with Islamic concepts was consistent with the predominant Chinese intellectual discourse of his day, in which scholars of various schools engaged in debate. In this, Liu Zhi continued a discursive trend, following in the footsteps of his Han Kitāb forebears. For example, Wang Daiyu was known to have socialized and participated in spirited discussions about various religio-philosophical subjects with representatives of different traditions and faith communities, the substance of these exchanges informing his writings. Wang Daiyu and Liu Zhi were both residents of Nanjing, China’s most cosmopolitan city at the time and a center of learning for many schools of thought. Growing up in such an environment they were naturally influenced by the traffic of ideas that buzzed around them, and they benefited from the unrivaled access to texts in the city’s libraries and bookshops. The broad range of religious and philosophical teachings available to them helped to expand the scope of Chinese Islamic intellectual discourse in the writings of these two famous Nanjing Muslims. Therefore, Ford is able to say of them: “Like Wang Tai-yü, Liu wanted to escape from the old inward-looking Islamic attitude and show himself a real universalist, and he went further in that direction than Wang had done.”¹⁸

One of the ways Liu Zhi’s universalism exceeded Wang Daiyu’s was in his overt and documented use of diverse sources, which went beyond even the canons and secondary literature of the Three Teachings. While traces of Chinese Catholic influence may be gleaned in the writings of Wang Daiyu or Ma Zhu, Liu Zhi was the first of the Han Kitāb writers to refer unabashedly to Christian literature. Modern scholars have debated the meaning of Liu Zhi’s claim in his preface to the *Tianfang zhizheng shilu* that he had read “one hundred thirty-seven types of Occidental” books. Many Catholic texts, translations and/or compositions

by Jesuit missionaries and/or Chinese converts, had already been in circulation for almost a century by the time Liu Zhi began to publish his work. The Jesuit presence was particularly strong in Nanjing, a hotbed of intellectual activity and interfaith dialogue, where a number of prominent Jesuit missionaries, beginning with Ricci, had earned high rank and honor in Chinese literati circles. These factors contributed to a widespread literati acceptance of the Catholic texts as a noteworthy addition to the literature of the day; even if many Chinese readers found the Jesuits' claims irreconcilably alien or untenable, they could not simply ignore them. And since it is well documented that the Jesuits had taken a scholarly interest in the Chinese Jewish community, we may also assume that Jewish writings, directly or indirectly, influenced the Han Kitāb writers. Thus by the time Liu Zhi had entered the stream, the Jewish and Christian literature was already part of the current.

ISLAMIC SOURCES

Liu Zhi did not discriminate when it came to his Islamic sources either. Among the bibliographical lists Liu Zhi included in some of his more famous books, one finds a remarkably wide range of Islamic literature, representing multiple genres. In addition to the Qur'ān, there are commentaries on scripture (*tafsīr*); a Ḥadīth collection; various works of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*); manuals on Muslim practice; books on the life of the Prophet Muḥammad (*sīra*) and other prophets and saints; several texts on Sufi philosophy and devotional piety; and a number of philological, geographical, and astronomical works.

Leslie and Wassel have identified nearly all of the sixty-six¹⁹ titles listed by Liu Zhi in bibliographies in the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli*. Their findings led to the following conclusions about the diverse origins of Liu Zhi's Islamic sources:

1. Many of the texts, especially those (originally written) in Arabic, are standard Sunni Hanafite texts of law and ritual.
2. Very few if any are Shī'a. However, the Kubrāwīyya sect, Sunni but with Shī'a connections, is prominent.
3. Many works, especially those in Persian, are Sufi. Besides the Kubrāwīyya, the influence of the Naqshabandi Sufi Jāmī is evident.
4. There are almost certainly more works in Persian listed than in Arabic.
5. Most are almost certainly extant in the West.
6. We may postulate a link with Central Asian Muslim sources, then Persian, and only finally with the original Arabic sources.²⁰

His bibliographies demonstrate that, beyond what might be considered a standard Sunni upbringing, Liu Zhi was also willing to incorporate a wide range of Islamic concepts into his writing and worldview. The distance of the other Han Kitāb writers, and Chinese Muslims in general, from the central Islamic world certainly played a role in Liu Zhi's ability to read all sorts of Islamic literature without prejudice. That is to say, he read these Arabic and Persian texts in Nanjing, in the heart of the Chinese culture area, and entirely without the context of current or historical debates within the Muslim intellectual world. Under these circumstances, he may not have been aware that he was dealing with potentially divisive material. It would appear instead that he saw any text in Arabic or Persian, whatever he could find, as legitimately stemming from the Islamic heartland and thus containing truth, paying little or no attention to whether a book was Sufi, Shī'a, or Sunni.

Perhaps the cosmopolitan attitude of Chinese literati culture in Nanjing, reflected in his assimilation of Neo-Confucianism and even tolerance of Three Teachings pluralism and syncretism, had also spilled over into his treatment of diversity within Islam. Of course, it is also likely that his decision to use so many different styles of Islamic literature was dictated in large part by the availability of books in China, as Liu Zhi's lists of sources has been described as "in sum, a complete catalogue of all the known Arabic and Persian works in China around the year 1700."²¹

SUFI SOURCES

Sufi texts are both significant and abundant among Liu Zhi's sources. The infusion of Sufi thought in the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum and the Han Kitāb corpus was an innovation that had already taken root in Chinese Muslim scholarship in the generations preceding Liu Zhi. Thus while the spread of Sufi ideas in central and eastern China may have represented a departure from the more conservative exoteric tradition, Liu Zhi's co-option of theoretical Sufism in his writings was utterly consistent with the trend seen in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network throughout the seventeenth century. Indeed, as stated above, virtually all Muslim intellectual work of this period anywhere in the world was imbued with or influenced by Sufi thought. Thus Liu Zhi's assimilation of Sufism reflected what was really a universal phenomenon in Islamic scholarship and not a peculiarly Chinese trend, even though its manifestation in the Han Kitāb corpus assumed uniquely Chinese characteristics.²²

Books such as the *Mirṣād al-'Ibād min al-Mabdā ila'l-Ma'ād* by al-Rāzī (d. 1256) had become staples of the Jingtang Jiaoyu curriculum by the time Liu Zhi embarked on his study of the Islamic canon. Liu Zhi listed this work, under both

its Chinese translated and transliterated titles, in the bibliographies of the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli*. It was obviously an influential source for him, as it was for many Chinese Muslim literati, and was one of a handful of Sufi texts to which he repeatedly referred.²³ Of these, four sources are cited more often than any others: (1) The *Mirṣād*; (2) *Maqṣad i Aqṣā*;²⁴ (3) *Ashi* ‘‘at al-Lama ‘āt;²⁵ and (4) *Lawā’ih fī Bayān Ma’āni ‘Irfaniyya*.²⁶ These four books figure so prominently among Liu Zhi’s sources that he included them in what he called the “basic texts” (*benjing*, lit. “root classics”) of the *Tianfang xingli*. Leslie and Wassel state that, given their centrality among his sources, these “mainly Sufi works” constitute “the core of Liu Chih’s philosophy and cosmogony.”²⁷

All four of Liu Zhi’s “root classics” were translated into Chinese by Han Kitāb scholars.²⁸ That the first three titles above were available to Liu Zhi as Chinese sources illustrates clearly how Sufism had already infused the Chinese Muslim educational curriculum and scholarly network by the time he began his literary career. Liu Zhi himself translated the fourth text, the *Lawā’ih*, reinforcing what we have already observed about his scholarship being deeply rooted in the traditions that preceded it. Thus, in addition to being an innovator and author of “original” Han Kitāb literature, Liu Zhi was also a translator after the tradition of the previous generations of Chinese Muslim scholars. And although his use of Sufi literature and concepts was not his own innovation but rather the continuation of an existing practice, Liu Zhi did provide his readers and bequeath to posterity a comprehensive list of his sources, Sufi and otherwise, that distinguishes him from his predecessors.

Sufi texts and ideas were circulating in the Chinese Muslim scholarly network by the middle of the seventeenth century, when Wang Daiyu’s metaphysical and theological formulations showed clear signs of mystical influence. But because “Wang almost never cites Arabic words or mentions the names of Muslim scholars in his writings . . . it would be difficult to make anything more than circumstantial arguments for such influence.”²⁹ By contrast, Liu Zhi’s remarkably systematic approach to scholarship produced a meticulous cataloguing of his Islamic sources. There is a strong resemblance among a number of theories in the writing of the two Nanjing-based scholars, particularly on the subject of Divine Unity (i.e., *tawhīd*). However, due to his more systematic methods, we are better able to trace Sufi concepts and their origins in Liu Zhi’s writing than in either Wang Daiyu’s or Ma Zhu’s. Also, because Liu Zhi was active about a half century after Wang Daiyu and a generation after Ma Zhu, he likely had access to a greater number and range of sources, including more Sufi texts. Therefore, it is not only true that Liu Zhi provided more explicit evidence of his Sufi influences, but he probably also read and cited more Sufi books than other Chinese Muslim scholars before him.

As we have observed, in the early days of the Chinese Muslim educational

reforms, the paucity of printed books led to an eagerness to acquire any and all available Islamic literature. The inclusion of Sufi texts in the curriculum, however, was not merely the result of a completely random process. There is strong evidence to suggest that other sinicized Muslims of the late Ming–early Qing period were already under the influence of Sufi spiritual beliefs and intellectual traditions from Central Asia. After all, the pioneer of the Jingtang educational reforms, Hu Dengzhou, whose translation of Islamic texts formed the roots of the Han Kitāb corpus, acquired many of the books he used on his journey into Central Asia and the Middle East. Whether he had been exposed to Sufi teachings before leaving China we cannot be sure, but we can safely assume that during his travels he would have come into direct contact with individuals or communities for whom Sufi ideas were not merely theoretical abstractions but part of a living tradition of devotional practice. We have no documentary evidence to indicate to what extent, if any, Hu Dengzhou was initiated in Sufi practice. It is clear, however, that the educational and curricular reforms he implemented upon his return to China, and the body of literature to grow out of them, were influenced by Sufism from the outset. Thus the dual factors of a desire to expand the curriculum and the appeal of theoretical Sufism operated together in the evolution of Chinese Muslim scholarship and persisted as the burgeoning scholarly network turned its attention to translating Islamic texts into Chinese.

As the Chinese Muslim curriculum grew considerably with the inclusion of the early Han Kitāb translations, many continued to read, translate, and teach Sufi texts. The use of certain Sufi books became institutionalized among the Chinese Muslim scholarly network. Many Sufi concepts had become fully naturalized, treated as equal expressions of Islamic orthodoxy as any drawn from standard religious sources. Indeed, in their translations and discussions of these mystical texts, Chinese Muslim scholars grouped them together with other Islamic literature, including the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, under the common rubric *jīng*, which is used in Chinese to describe philosophical and religious “classics” in general.³⁰ Sufi books became an indispensable source of Islamic knowledge, put on a par with classical Chinese and Islamic literature, and their use was governed by conscious choice as much as, if not more than, by necessity.

Thus, if Liu Zhi did not use Sufism more extensively than his Han Kitāb predecessors did, he certainly did so more unabashedly, documenting his Sufi sources openly and meticulously. The confident expression of Muslim identity and the systematic nature of his writing may have been influenced by precedents he had seen in the work of Ma Zhu. On the other hand, the spirit of his scholarship, it has been observed, was much more derivative of Wang Daiyu, though Liu Zhi was even more universalistic in his outlook. His universalism was manifested in the wide variety of texts, both Chinese and Islamic, that he incorporated as sources.

From the Chinese side of his heritage, Neo-Confucianism represented almost seven hundred years of syncretism. Thus, although it was the state orthodoxy of the day and as such could be intolerant of Buddhist or Daoist beliefs and practices deemed heterodox, it had nevertheless assimilated many elements from both of these traditions, synthesizing a comprehensive system of metaphysics. From the Islamic side of his heritage, the rich tradition of intellectual Sufism offered Liu Zhi theological and cosmological options that complimented exoteric interpretations of Islamic scriptural traditions, whereby he could build conceptual links to the syncretic Chinese traditions.

A LASTING LEGACY

Quite naturally, Liu Zhi's most direct influences came from those scholars who preceded him most proximally. We can see clear influences from his father, Liu Sanjie, from whom he inherited his desire to study and teach about Islam, particularly its history, both abroad and in China, as well as its laws and customs. Liu Zhi was certainly also influenced by his teacher, Yuan Ruqi, a maternal cousin of Liu Sanjie. Relatively little has been recorded about Yuan Ruqi's scholarship beyond the fact that "he was known as a good orator and also a poet."³¹ Yuan Ruqi's connection to the scholarly and pedagogical traditions of his father, Yuan Shengzhi, is important, for it is through this line that we may trace Liu Zhi's interests in philology and, perhaps, Sufism.³²

Liu Zhi was clearly also influenced by the two "original" Han Kitāb writers who preceded him: Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu. Liu Zhi's outlook and the content of his writings bear the strongest resemblance to those of Wang Daiyu. Liu Zhi, however, actually went beyond the precedents set by Wang Daiyu, who had used Confucian concepts and terms, but always "maintained the fundamental truths and superiority of Islam."³³ Liu Zhi sometimes also implied the superiority of Islam, but his writings often suggest that Islam and Confucianism were both manifestations of the same principle of truth. To Liu Zhi, Islam was slightly more complete in its spiritual expressions, but by positing an "ethical parallelism, Liu Zhi placed Islam and Confucianism on an equal footing."³⁴ In other words, Liu Zhi went to greater lengths to accommodate the dominant Confucian paradigm into his universal vision of Islam. He justified this in a preface to the *Tianfang xingli*, where he wrote of the necessity of thoroughly understanding all Chinese teachings lest "Islamic scholarship . . . be confined to one corner, and . . . not be the common learning of the world."³⁵

We may even detect a note of proselytism in this statement, a sentiment that Chinese Muslims rarely if ever indulged. Liu Zhi may not have been preaching the conversion of China to Islam, but just that Islam and Confucianism partook

of the same universal truth and could therefore coexist in complete harmony. Even so, the degree to which Liu Zhi absorbed Confucian ideas into his view and presentation of Islam in Chinese “was more marked than that of any other Muslim and it has sometimes been questioned whether he did not compromise his Muslim principles.”³⁶ Lipman aptly describes Liu Zhi’s view as straddling the line “between Wang Daiyu’s feisty defense of Islamic uniqueness and the writings of entirely acculturated scholars from ex-Muslim families, which are indistinguishable from non-Muslim texts.”³⁷

Despite the similarities between Liu Zhi’s work and Wang Daiyu’s, a major difference in their methodologies is clearly noticeable. Unlike Wang Daiyu, who approached his work in an admittedly informal manner, Liu Zhi was meticulously systematic in his writing. In this regard, he may have found inspiration in the writing of Ma Zhu, whose *Qingzhen zhinan* in the previous generation set a new standard for systematic presentation among the Han Kitāb. Like Ma Zhu, Liu Zhi made sure to adorn the beginning of his books with as many laudatory prefaces as he could obtain. Showing himself to be more cosmopolitan and better recognized than his predecessor, however, Liu Zhi included a few prefaces written by prominent non-Muslim Confucian scholars besides those from fellow Muslims.

If Ma Zhu exerted any direct influence upon Liu Zhi’s scholarship, it was surely in the areas of layout and presentation. Like the *Qingzhen zhinan*, Liu Zhi’s major works are extremely well organized, divided into discrete chapters arranged topically. However, unlike Ma Zhu, whose book is comprehensive, covering the gamut of Islamic orthodoxy and orthopraxy in a single tome, Liu Zhi opted to write multiple books, each covering in great detail a specific aspect of Islam. Thus he is best known for his “*Tianfang* trilogy”: the *Tianfang xingli*, *Tianfang dianli*, and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*. There is, to be sure, a certain amount of overlap within Liu Zhi’s prodigious body of works, but each is devoted to a single main theme. Liu Zhi also carefully arranged his books into topical chapters with an eye toward the progression of ideas not only within these chapters, but also from the beginning of the book to the end.

His view of the systematic unfolding of ideas extended even further. In an autobiographical essay about the process of writing appended to his last major work, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, Liu Zhi sought to explain how his various distinct books were to be read in concert to complete a grand study of the “metaconcepts” of Chinese Islam. First describing the intensive study of diverse traditions that prepared him for his career as an author, Liu Zhi then wrote of his literary endeavor in general and the “*Tianfang* trilogy” in particular. He expressed a clear concern with the systematic, methodical presentation of his ideas and a grand vision: “Thus, as far as these books are concerned, they are three yet

actually constitute one whole. They were published in incremental steps as I attained mastery over [their subject matter] to some extent.”³⁸

Liu Zhi cited his motivation for writing his biography of the Prophet Muḥammad as the desire to “explain the profound origins of the Teaching and the Way,” which is related to another innovative aspect of his methodology. The interconnected notions of reliable sources and legitimate origins were extremely important to Liu Zhi. We can clearly see this connection not only in his writing of the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, but also in his interest, inherited from his father, in chronicling the “historical” origins of Islam in China in his *Huihui shuo*. His interest in establishing the origins of Islam is also apparent in the *Tianfang dianli*, whose first chapter, titled “*Yuanjiao*” (either “The Original Teaching” or “Origin and the Teaching,” depending on interpretation), attempts to place Islam at the center of human history by tracing its origins from Adam through Muḥammad. Liu Zhi’s emphasis on origins certainly has something to do with his desire to confer upon Islam and Chinese Muslims an air of authenticity, orthodoxy, and legitimacy. This, as we have seen, was a central concern of Chinese Muslim scholars in the late Ming–early Qing period, and Liu Zhi enthusiastically took it up himself.

Liu Zhi’s related interest in authentic sources to support his portrayal of Islamic legitimacy also helps to explain why he was the first Han Kitāb writer to publish lists of his textual sources in his books. Albeit an innovation within the Chinese Muslim literary genre, Liu Zhi’s documentation of his sources also clearly demonstrates his living connection to the traditions out of which he emerged. To wit, his bibliographies in the Han Kitāb “further clarify our understanding of the ways in which Chinese Muslim scholarship was invariably produced in an ongoing conversation with earlier works and ideas.”³⁹ Serving as a link in the chain of Chinese Muslim literati, Liu Zhi’s innovation was also a model for future generations of scholars.⁴⁰

Liu Zhi’s concern with the presentation of authentic sources was part of the impetus toward the greater systematization that he brought to Chinese Islamic scholarship. In this regard, besides putting on display his recondite Islamic learning, he also emulated time-honored practices of Chinese scholarship. Listing his sources gave Liu Zhi’s scholarship an appearance of greater formality and authority, which in turn increased the credibility of his theories and arguments for a literate audience. Bibliographies were a recognized symbol of erudition among Chinese literati and were of increasing importance in the Confucian textual studies movement of the day.⁴¹ Liu Zhi, aware of this trend and wishing to add rigor to his work, thus raised the standard of Chinese Islamic scholarship. This likely also resulted in greater prestige for himself and other Muslims in the eyes of educated Chinese elites, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

COMMENDATION AND CRITICISM

Liu Zhi's accomplishments were recognized by his contemporaries, both Muslim and non-Muslim, and have continued to be admired by later generations down to the present day. He also had his detractors, but they were far fewer and less articulate than those who have praised him and his work. It is only natural, perhaps, that a scholar who ventured so boldly into new intellectual territory should have ruffled some feathers along the way, but the response to his work was, on the whole, extremely positive. Liu Zhi's Muslim literati colleagues sang his praises in prefaces to several of his important works. These Muslim friends and associates, in addition to lauding Liu Zhi's scholarly attainments and literary accomplishments, also tended to speak in superlative terms about his personal qualities of diligence and his moral virtue. For instance, his teacher, Yuan Ruqi, wrote of him in a preface to the *Tianfang xingli*:

What sort of a man is Jielian? Is he not a great man? He is not great in terms of worldly affairs, but rather in terms of morality—the virtue of the Way. He is not great in terms of human ability, but rather in terms of what people are unable to do. That is how he achieved his indefatigability. How great indeed!⁴²

Admiration from his elders and contemporaries notwithstanding, the legacy Liu Zhi left to later generations of Chinese Muslim scholars was especially important. Yuan Ruqi's grandson, Yuan Guozuo (b. 1712), was strongly influenced by Liu Zhi's writings and played a major role in their propagation among subsequent generations. He edited and published, or republished, several of Liu Zhi's books. Around 1780, he published the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, complete with a preface and postscript of his own. In the preface, he echoed his grandfather's praise of Liu Zhi's virtues in the most Confucian of terms: "Master Liu's loyalty, filiality, benevolence and kindness truly were inconceivable."⁴³

In addition to these personal qualities, Yuan Guozuo also showed a deep appreciation for Liu Zhi's pivotal role in the lineage of Islamic scholarship:

Not only did he perform meritorious service to the sages of the past, but he has also brought profound benefit to the generations that came after him. If Master Liu had not continued his father's will, endlessly magnifying the benevolent favor of the Teaching of the sage, how could there have been such dazzling brilliance as this?⁴⁴

The association of Liu Zhi with the "sages of the past" went even further among

some of his Muslim admirers. Within certain Chinese Muslim circles, Liu Zhi has posthumously been afforded almost saint-like status. To wit, the marker at his tomb in Nanjing refers to him as an “ancient worthy” (*xianxian*).⁴⁵

Yuan Guozuo's profound admiration of Liu Zhi and his writings may also have contributed to the greatest distinction afforded to any Han Kitāb book, namely the inclusion of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu* (Compendium of the Four Treasuries). This compendium, commissioned by the Qianlong emperor, was compiled between 1773 and 1782, about half a century after Liu Zhi's death. Yuan Guozuo may well have answered the imperial court's call for books and manuscripts from around the realm, leading him to compile his own list of extant Chinese Islamic texts.⁴⁶ The *Tianfang dianli* was prominent among the titles in Yuan Guozuo's bibliography, a fact that might have contributed to the book's inclusion in the *Siku quanshu*. It may also have been presented, together with Liu Zhi's two other most famous works (the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*) to the Qianlong emperor in 1782.⁴⁷

Surely another factor in the recognition of the *Tianfang dianli*, and of Liu Zhi's scholarship in general, was the approval and respect he earned from influential non-Muslim Chinese readers. After completing the book, Liu Zhi traveled to Beijing with the manuscript, probably in an attempt to present it to the court. He did not achieve this ambition, but he did manage to meet in the capital with a number of high-ranking Confucian officials, developing friendly and collegial relations with several of these influential men. As a result, Liu Zhi “achieved considerable fame and moved in exalted circles for part of his life.”⁴⁸

These relationships demonstrate that Liu Zhi saw himself as existing in a broad scholarly community “that was not inevitably circumscribed by Islam.”⁴⁹ This self-perception was justified by the fact that he received favorable responses to his work from non-Muslims in addition to the endorsements and commendations from his co-religionists. The positive reactions of some non-Muslim literati to Liu Zhi's writings were likely both a cause and an effect of his extremely conciliatory attitude toward Confucianism and his impeccable scholarly methodology. That is, Liu Zhi's desire to appeal to an audience beyond his own ethno-religious community inspired him to incorporate a wide range of sources and assimilate, or at least address, a diversity of views. It also caused him to delve more deeply into the culture of Confucian scholarship and adopt its rhetorical language and methods more than any other Chinese Muslim writer had before him. These features did not go unnoticed by the Confucian scholars who read his work and led them to greater acceptance of Liu Zhi, and by extension Islam, which in turn reinforced Liu Zhi's outlook and approach.

Seeking advice and constructive criticism, Liu Zhi solicited comments from Muslim and non-Muslim literati. Citing these motivations, he wrote, “As

for whether or not my selections were appropriate, and whether the language in which they are expressed is elegant, I especially hope that those who share my purpose will give their opinions.”⁵⁰ Beyond this, however, we may also speculate that Liu Zhi was seeking the approval and imprimatur of the Confucian literati. Some of them were willing to write prefaces to his books. Naturally, the prefaces that were published are all extremely enthusiastic toward his work. We do not know whether others he solicited replied with less favorable comments.

In contrast to the Muslim preface writers mentioned above, whose praise tended to emphasize Liu Zhi's high moral character first and his scholarly attainments second, the non-Muslim writers focused more on his literary ability before his manifestation of Confucian virtues. In general, the common opinion expressed by these scholars was twofold: They were pleasantly surprised to discover from Liu Zhi's presentation that Islam was so congenial to their own Confucianism, and they quite admired Liu Zhi's diligence and literary talent, which allowed him to convey that impression. Since Liu Zhi's harmonization of Confucian and Islamic ideals assured non-Muslim readers that Islam was not a threat to Chinese political and social norms, his work, out of all the Han Kitāb literature, received the strongest approval among non-Muslim literati. Judging from the laudatory language of several of his preface writers, he truly earned their respect, not only for demonstrating good Confucian values, but also for his broad knowledge and elegant writing style.

Some of the most lavish praises from non-Muslim readers are found in prefaces to the *Tianfang dianli*, a fact that likely later helped recommend the book to be included in the *Siku quanshu*. Three of the prefaces were written by non-Muslim *jinshi*, holders of the highest civil degree, two of them vice ministers.⁵¹ The first of these, Lu You, was a vice minister of the Board of War.⁵² His 1709 preface begins with his admission to holding some anti-Islamic bias before meeting Liu Zhi and reading his book: “The Teaching of Islam came from Arabia where the people are so sharply different from us . . . (so) in the past, I had tended to suspect that they had established a teaching outside the pale of our Confucianism . . . tantamount to the proliferation of Daoism and Buddhism.”⁵³ However, after receiving Liu Zhi in his home and discussing topics of philosophy and metaphysics with him at great length, Lu You agreed to read the *Tianfang dianli*, and he “saw its detailed expressions and subtle meanings to be absolutely reasonable and erudite.”⁵⁴ Furthermore, he found Liu Zhi's arguments so persuasive that after reading the book, he could declare that “the teachings of Islam were neither slanted nor biased, but were aligned perfectly with the teachings of the Chinese sages; in principle they are the same, and their Way is entirely in harmony.”⁵⁵ Moreover, “we cannot speak of them in the same breath as those heterodoxies and twisted theories.”⁵⁶

Lu You attributed his newfound appreciation for Islam to Liu Zhi's erudition

and literary skill, commenting specifically on the “concise and methodical” organization of his discourse.⁵⁷ Thus it would appear that Liu Zhi’s systematic approach to his subject matter, innovative among the Han Kitāb, made an extremely positive impression upon his reader. Reading further, we detect the genuine admiration Lu You developed for Liu Zhi. He was especially complimentary of Liu Zhi’s universal outlook, his consummate literacy, and his ability to harmonize the diverse traditions he had undertaken to master:

I am delighted by Master Liu’s broad knowledge and rare talent for expression. His mind is on the infinite and universal; he is not only proficient in the Islamic canon, but also has a thorough understanding of the Chinese classics, and he has blended them harmoniously and woven them together to write a book in order to clarify these teachings.⁵⁸

Liu Zhi’s writing reassured Lu You that Islam was no threat to social order, leading him to say of the *Tianfang dianli*: “Among its thoroughgoing sections there is nothing ambiguously phrased, nor is there any word that would alarm the world or frighten the common people.”⁵⁹ Yet he went even further in his commendation of the book and its author, comparing the work to the inviolable texts of the Confucian canon:

(Master Liu) is able to fathom the depths and search the invisible, so as to reach the most essential mysteries. . . . This book on ritual may almost be as notable in Heaven and Earth as the Six Classics. Whoever reads this book, pondering deeply, will have something to gain therefrom—grasping the origin and holding the foundation, as if it were right in front of them. Heaven and man are both fully expressed. Both the invisible and the obvious obtain the same final result.⁶⁰

The writer of the second preface to the *Tianfang dianli* was Xu Zhuo, a vice minister of the Board of Rites.⁶¹ His 1709 appraisal of Liu Zhi and his writing, though perhaps less effusive in its tone, nonetheless echoes the major themes covered by Lu You:

This Master Liu has used Confucian terminology to transmit Western learning, in order to instruct his colleagues and co-religionists. While geography has its “east” and “west,” Principle knows no borders. As for this ritual, although it comes from Arabia, nevertheless its Principle penetrates the whole world. We and those of our group should not begrudge Master Liu his knowledge and ability. In terms of the

capacity to transform people, the mind and Principle are the same. It is not contrary to any of the correct doctrines in Heaven and Earth, and there is no doubt in its spirit. How much more should we grant Master Liu a hearing when he speaks of the “Way of Heaven” and “Way of Man” in an unusually comprehensive fashion? If scholars can apply themselves to studying this book, then they would fulfill the saying of the classics that “man should completely conform to Heaven.” And how can this ideal be confined by any geographical boundary?⁶²

Like Lu You, Xu Zhuo focused on the universality of Liu Zhi’s ideas, implying their compatibility to Neo-Confucian doctrines. He also reiterated the common opinion of all the preface writers—that Liu Zhi’s knowledge and rare ability to express these sophisticated concepts distinguish him from other scholars.

The writer of the third preface to the *Tianfang dianli* was also a non-Muslim official. This was a *jinshi* named Jing Rizhen, imperial censor of the Shaanxi Circuit in 1707 when he wrote on behalf of Liu Zhi.⁶³ In his preface, Jing Rizhen focused in particular on Liu Zhi’s theories about “oneness.” He appears to have inferred from the discussion not only lessons on metaphysical monism (or, from an Islamic perspective, Divine Unity), but also the idea of being able to unify diverse phenomena on the human plane. He praised Liu Zhi’s ability to delve into a wide variety of literary sources and genres and “reconcile all of them with the Six Classics.”⁶⁴ However, he seems to have particularly appreciated Liu Zhi’s ability to demonstrate the worldly applicability of his ideas. He commented specifically on the conversation they shared “on the causes of peace and disorder, and prosperity and destruction, from ancient times to the present day,” and on such diverse topics as astronomy and geography.⁶⁵ Moreover, he saw this entire discourse as relating to the supreme Neo-Confucian ideal of the “complete union of Heaven and man” to which Liu Zhi often refers throughout the *Tianfang dianli*.

Jing Rizhen also spoke admiringly of Liu Zhi’s personal qualities, calling him “mild-mannered and restrained, studious and fond of books.”⁶⁶ These are the scholarly traits that enabled Liu Zhi to perform such an extraordinary work of reconciliation, in which, according to Jing Rizhen, he lived up to the standard for study established by the Han dynasty scholar (and paragon of filial piety) Huang Xiang (53–117 CE). Such praise is extraordinary, as is Jing Rizhen’s final passage, which raises Liu Zhi up as an example of universal scholarly virtue: “I relate what he has studied and compiled in order to inform those in the world who are not fond of learning or are not good at it. When they hear how the gentleman Liu has devoted himself to study, they will know how to return to virtue.”⁶⁷

The general tone of Liu Zhi’s non-Muslim preface writers was positive, extolling both his personal qualifications as a scholar and, moreover, his remarkable

achievement of bringing Islam into the arena of legitimate and acceptable Chinese intellectual discourse. It may be that in an era of great change and diversity, such as the Kangxi period, some Confucians were willing to embrace the work of scholars whom their forebears may not have received so favorably. During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Confucian orthodoxy faced challenges from movements both within and outside its own ideological community. The arbiters of this orthodoxy were happy to encounter intellectuals from diverse backgrounds who shared their values. Scholars like Liu Zhi, whose writings reflected a commitment to orthodox Confucian ideals despite their Islamic context, could be recruited as allies in the struggle against the influences of Buddhism, Daoism, and other teachings deemed heterodox.

Liu Zhi was well aware of these cultural and intellectual dynamics of his time, and so he deliberately aligned himself, and Islam, with the Confucian tradition. He did this by invoking, among other things, the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages, whom he deftly equated with Muḥammad. The success of his approach is indicated by the strong approval he received from non-Muslim readers, as epitomized in an oft-cited 1708 preface to the *Tianfang xingli* by Xu Yuanzheng,⁶⁸ who wrote:

Master Liu's translation into Chinese also teaches about China and that which China holds dear. This book brings back into view the Way of the ancient sages: Yan and Shun, Yu and Tang, King Wen, King Wu, the Duke of Zhou, and Confucius. Thus, although this book was written to explain Islam, it actually glorifies and magnifies our own Confucianism. How could we have known that the breadth of Master Liu's mind was so extensive, or that his work would stretch so far back into the past?⁶⁹

Such admiration of Liu Zhi's universalism, congeniality toward Confucianism, and methodical approach to scholarship notwithstanding, his writings were not unanimously praised. As might be expected, criticisms of his work were not preserved in the same way as the laudatory responses that were included in his books. In fact, among traditional sources contemporary with Liu Zhi, I do not know of any recorded denunciations of his work. But there is good reason to accept Lipman's claim that he was frequently "criticized by both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars as too Confucian, too conciliatory to China's hegemonic philosophical discourse."⁷⁰ We may infer much of the substance of this criticism from the subtext of Liu Zhi's own writings and of those who wrote on his behalf.

There are a few telling phrases in the more confessional passages of the prefaces, introductions, and essays Liu Zhi appended to his books, in which he

reveals his awareness of criticism. For example, in his own preface to the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi spoke of his motivation for writing the book, and how he made every effort to render the text accessible to readers who may not be familiar with the subject of Islamic ritual. He explained that some concepts were especially difficult to express and how he used different methodological approaches to such problematic sections. He ends the passage saying, "There are matters that are quite ordinary, but which the narrow-minded slander as being strange [or heterodox]. In these cases, I anticipate and give voice to their questions, and answer them so as to cure them of their perplexities."⁷¹

Liu Zhi was aware of opposition to his ideas and/or methods and was willing to confront both actual and potential detractors in his writing. Among those he would have had to answer were the representatives of a more conservative brand of Chinese Muslim traditionalism. Like other Han Kitāb writers, Liu Zhi suffered "the scorn of Muslim traditionalists, who called them antiscriptural and perverters of customs."⁷² Within the context of the great changes that befell Chinese Muslim communities during the late Ming–early Qing period, the resistance by the more traditional religious authorities to innovations brought by the new wave of Islamic education and scholarship in China is easily understandable.

In his introduction, or "Instructions" (*liyan*), to the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi confronted directly those who accused him of being antiscriptural or perverting custom, as he wrote: "Gentle reader, do not consider that I am opposing the classics and deviating from custom. This book opposes misguided customs by conforming to the classics, and that is all."⁷³ Interestingly, in this and similar passages, it is difficult to determine whether Liu Zhi's perceived critics are Muslims or non-Muslims. The word he uses, *jing*, is translated here as "classics," a standard rendering in anglophone sinology to refer to the Confucian canon. As we know, however, *jing* is also used by Daoists and Buddhists to refer to their canons, and has been used by Chinese Jews and Christians to refer to theirs. Thus, depending on the context, *jing* may also be translated as "scripture(s)." In the Han Kitāb, and particularly in the broad syncretism of Liu Zhi's usage, *jing* may be understood as referring to the Islamic scriptures, principally to the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth, but also to other Islamic texts, as well as the Chinese classics, or to all of these. No single, consistent English translation for a term like *jing* can do justice to Liu Zhi's meaning.⁷⁴ Therefore, the above phrase is, perhaps intentionally, ambiguous, as Liu Zhi does not explicitly identify from which scriptural tradition his critics believe him to be deviating.

In the following passage of this introduction Liu Zhi expressed his most explicit acknowledgment of the criticism he faced, as he wrote, "Since the tone of this book does not conform to the tone of Jingtang education, then it is impossible to avoid criticism. But there is no need for criticism!"⁷⁵ The term Jingtang

originally referred to the traditional form of mosque-based Islamic education found in the Muslim communities around China. This educational system was, of course, reformed starting in the late sixteenth century by Hu Dengzhou and his colleagues, with the introduction of Islamic literature translated into Chinese, and eventually gave rise to the Han Kitāb scholars and their literary enterprise. Are we to infer from Liu Zhi's statement that he either received or anticipated the criticism of representatives of the very educational system that had produced him?

Such an interpretation is indeed possible, for although some of the strongest criticism would have come from the traditionalists mentioned above, it is nevertheless conceivable that even some in his own ideological camp criticized him for what they deemed an excessive appropriation and assimilation of Chinese terminology and concepts. Jingtang educational reforms had introduced Confucian influence into the Chinese Muslim classroom and curriculum, and this in turn had produced several generations of increasingly "Confucianized" Muslim students and scholars. Liu Zhi was clearly a product of the evolution of Chinese Islamic scholarship that occurred within the framework of this educational system, and his thinking was shaped by its literature. But his particularly innovative use of sources and ideas, drawing mostly from Confucianism but also engaging a wide range of Chinese religio-philosophical teachings, exceeded that of most other Chinese Muslim scholars.

It is noteworthy that in his defense against possible critics, Liu Zhi did not say that his book differs in substance from the curriculum of Jingtang Jiaoyu, but rather in "tone." Liu Zhi intended to affirm his connection to Jingtang education and redress claims to the contrary. He was, after all, a product of this educational system and differed from it not in the content of his scholarship nor in the use of classical Chinese terminology to express the principles of Islam. The difference, as Liu Zhi saw it, was one of "tone," or the degree to which he assimilated Confucian concepts and other Chinese traditions into his thought and writing. Liu Zhi meant to emphasize the commonality of his approach and that of Jingtang education and ease doubts among his fellow Muslims about his commitment to Islamic scholarship, or indeed to Islam itself. He stressed that the criticism against him was simply unfounded and unnecessary.

Some of his own colleagues may have accused him of going too far in his acculturation and syncretism, to which he responded by arguing that those who objected to his views and approach did so out of their own ignorance of higher literary culture. In the subsequent lines of the introduction, Liu Zhi distinguished between levels of learning among potential readers:

This book is not written for an unlearned audience. For those who are not sufficiently literary, let the teachers of the classics act in

accordance with the classics and instruct them. They do not need this book. Rather, the ones who need this book are those who thoroughly understand and practice the Three Teachings, but never knew the rites of our Teaching. Reading these writings and grasping their meaning will naturally be of benefit to such readers. When they know of me, and if they blame me, I will let the people of this world decide between us.⁷⁶

In essence, Liu Zhi was saying that not all Muslims were inclined to, or capable of, the type of learning that he and those of his camp propounded. This invitation was extended to sinicized Muslims like himself, whose dual heritage made them especially open to more universal expressions of Islam but who were not knowledgeable about Islamic faith and practice, as well as open-minded non-Muslim Chinese readers who wished to expand their own understanding of universal truths.

As we have seen in the examples above, a number of individuals, both Muslim and non-Muslim and including some relatively important persons, definitely sided with Liu Zhi's views. Some of them even used their prefatory essays to defend him against criticism. For instance, Lu You, echoing Liu Zhi's own rhetorical challenge to the "people of the world," implied that only readers who are themselves worthy will see the real value of Liu Zhi's writings: "How the reader sees, listens, speaks and moves depends on the individual reader. Whatever one sees in the book, whether goodness or wisdom,⁷⁷ rests with the individual."⁷⁸ We have also seen above how Xu Zhuo defended Liu Zhi's scholarship against potential criticism from among his fellow Confucians ("We and those of our group should not begrudge Master Liu his knowledge and ability").⁷⁹

Liu Zhi also clearly saw the need to deflect such criticism. Even though rhetorically he was confident enough in his views to leave the final judgment of his work to the "people of the world," throughout his text we find further defense of his positions, and even countercriticism of his critics. In particular, he rebuked those whom he addressed as scholars, but whose scholarship, in his opinion, fell short of his own high standards. Thus, decrying the state of classical studies, he wrote, "[W]hen scholars discuss the classics and explain the meaning of their words, they often resort to the use of vulgar terms. They have not avoided incoherence and confusion, and have lost the point of the classics."⁸⁰ Liu Zhi cited this failure on the part of other scholars as the main impetus for his own painstaking efforts. Thus he contrasted himself with those whose "vulgarity," "incoherence," and "confusion" might have led them to criticize his work. Interestingly, once again Liu Zhi remains ambiguous by not specifying whether the scholars he is criticizing are Muslims or non-Muslims; he could be addressing

either or both groups. His self-defensive countercriticism, like his presentation of religious teachings and philosophical concepts, reveals itself to be a genuine and simultaneous expression of both Confucian and Islamic perspectives.

THE *TIANFANG DIANLI* IN THE *SIKU QUANSHU*

The most frequently cited evidence of the recognition Liu Zhi and his work received are the presentations of his books to the throne of the Qianlong emperor and the inclusion of the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu* imperial compendium, all of which occurred decades after his death. The *Tianfang dianli* entry in the *Siku quanshu* contains a rare example of an eighteenth-century non-Muslim, Confucian commentary on Liu Zhi's writing found outside of one of his own books. As such, it provides some insight into how the Confucian establishment viewed Liu Zhi and Islam in general.

Actually, to say that the *Tianfang dianli* was included in the *Siku quanshu* is somewhat misleading and fails to convey the complicated history of the great imperial compendium, how it was arranged, and the process by which it was compiled. Answering the 1772 call of the Qianlong emperor, who wished to undertake the greatest literary compendium in Chinese history, scholars across the country submitted whatever extant literature they could obtain. Local and provincial officials gathered the submissions and delivered them to the capital, where a special commission of Confucian scholar-officials was established. This Siku Commission culled the texts, eliminating whatever they regarded as useless or objectionable, and edited the rest for preservation in the compendium. All the texts collected were divided into traditional Chinese literary categories, the so-called "four treasures" (*siku*): classics (*jingbu*); history (*shibu*); philosophy (*zibu*);⁸¹ and belles lettres (*jibu*).⁸²

The Siku Commission was charged with sifting through the submissions and culling only those deemed worthy of preservation, following criteria intended to reflect the ideals of the Qianlong imperium. In reality, the Siku enterprise was not only the greatest compendium project in Chinese history, but also the most extensive censorship initiative. This "darker side" of the Siku enterprise represented for the Qing dynasty an unprecedented opportunity for the systematic proscription and elimination of texts containing ideas deemed harmful or seditious. In all, of the more than ten thousand titles examined by the Siku Commission, as many as twenty-four hundred were destroyed and four to five hundred more were "revised."⁸³ Consequently, inclusion in the *Siku quanshu* was tantamount to receiving the imprimatur of the throne and the orthodox Confucian establishment.

The Siku Commission was dominated by graduates of the Hanlin Academy, who were exponents of the *kaozheng* ("evidentiary studies") movement. Therefore,

the editors, favoring the literature of their own school, were quite restrictive in their admission of Song-Ming period Neo-Confucian texts into the compendium. They were all the more severe in their treatment of non-Confucian literature. It is therefore understandable in this context that Buddhist and Daoist texts were noticeably underrepresented. When one considers that so many Neo-Confucian and non-Confucian texts were kept out of the imperial compendium, it seems to enhance the status of the *Tianfang dianli* as the lone representative of Chinese Muslim scholarship to have been included.

We must however avoid rushing to the conclusion that Liu Zhi's book gained the unequivocal imprimatur of the Qianlong court. When we examine more closely the process by which texts were approved, as well as the various qualified distinctions under which they were listed, we see that the situation was significantly more complicated than a simple matter of inclusion or exclusion. Based on the commission's evaluations of a text, it could have one of a number of different fates. Of the many thousands of texts examined by the scholars, those that were deemed completely unacceptable politically or ideologically were not only excluded, but actually expunged. For those submissions that were not destroyed, there were yet other determinations to be made.

Before coming to the specific listing of Liu Zhi's book in the catalogue, it is first necessary to explain briefly the way the editors arranged the final product of the *Siku quanshu*. The main compendium, totaling 3,697 titles, consisted of "books selected by the *Ssu-k'u* Commission for inclusion in the imperial library."⁸⁴ Apart from this, there was also an annotated catalogue of all the titles and authors of approved works, "4,490 pages long in its modern reprint," called the *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao* (General Annotated Catalogue of the *Siku quanshu*). The *Tianfang dianli* was included in this latter section.

The emperor's chief councillor, Yu Minzhong (1714–1780), emphasized two criteria for books to be preserved in their full form in the imperial library, requiring that they be either "of real benefit to human understanding" or else "very seldom seen."⁸⁵ The "guiding principles" (*fanli*) for the annotated catalogue, on the other hand, emphasize the utility of texts, saying that the "learning of the sages emphasized clarifying the essence in order to achieve usefulness. All writings in which realities cannot be seen clearly are wasted words."⁸⁶ Within this framework Yu Minzhong added that "books which contained little that was praiseworthy and much that was contemptible would be listed by title only in the Annotated Catalog."⁸⁷ Judging conformity to these criteria and guidelines, and the corresponding fate of any given text, was a highly subjective and politicized process.

Given this context, we may now attempt to assess the relative place of the *Tianfang dianli* in the greater Siku project. Liu Zhi's book was listed among the

“extant titles” (*cunmu*) in the “miscellaneous schools” subsection in the “philosophy” section of the annotated catalogue. We can safely say that this was not the most prestigious placement possible. The book would certainly not have been deemed important enough for reprint in the *Collectanea*, nor was its manuscript preserved in the imperial library as part of the *Siku quanshu* collection. It was listed by title and author in the annotated catalogue, together with works that, according to Yu Minzhong’s criteria, “contained little that was praiseworthy and much that was contemptible.”

This designation notwithstanding, the *Tianfang dianli*’s status was not utterly negative. Reading Yu Minzhong’s criteria in the best possible light, for a text to have been mentioned in the catalogue meant that it contained at least a “little that was praiseworthy.” In this way, it was obviously better for a text to be acknowledged by the Siku Commission, even by a mere listing in the annotated catalogue, than to be omitted or, worse, expunged. The fact that Liu Zhi and his book were listed under the general heading of “philosophy,” rather than being “exiled” to the “belles lettres” section, was also a victory of sorts. The “philosophy” category was made up of some secondary Confucian writings; works on astronomy and mathematics; works on magic and divination; arts; medicine; and various texts representing the “hundred schools” of non-Confucian thought, including militarists, legalists, Buddhism, Daoism, and a broad heading called “miscellaneous schools” (*zajia*). Even though Liu Zhi’s text incorporates a significant amount of Confucian thought, it was principally concerned with a non-Confucian teaching, and therefore did not merit inclusion in the “classics” section. And while it also deals with topics, such as geography, that are within the purview of the “history” section, it did not really belong there either. All things considered, the assignment to the “philosophy” section was most appropriate and probably the best fate the book could have achieved.

The entry for the *Tianfang dianli* in the annotated catalogue only reinforces the ambivalence of the *Siku quanshu* scholars. The writer of the entry provided an objective biography highlighting Liu Zhi’s background and major scholarly achievements. He also accurately summarized the contents of the book. At the end of the entry, however, he added his editorial comments:

Everything is explained in detail, with great respect for his own religion’s teaching. Islam is fundamentally far-fetched and absurd. However, (Liu) Zhi has extensively studied Confucian texts, so he intermingled various ideas from the classics in order to embellish his discourse. His literary style is actually rather elegant. However, the premise is at its root untrue and so the clever literary ornamentation does him no good.⁸⁸

This tepid review echoes the positive statements made by the Confucian scholars who wrote prefaces to Liu Zhi's works a couple of generations earlier in their acknowledgment of his meticulous and systematic approach to scholarship, his erudition, and his eloquence. However, the bias against Islam as a foreign, fundamentally non-Confucian, and therefore unorthodox tradition is impossible to overlook. It would seem that nothing Liu Zhi could have done as a Chinese Muslim scholar, short of renouncing his religion, would have changed this impression, which was probably quite common among the Confucian literati at the time.⁸⁹

In the final analysis, of the manner in which Liu Zhi and the *Tianfang dianli* were treated by the *Siku quanshu* scholars, it may be said that their reaction to both the author and his work was predictably lukewarm. The book, after all, was but one of many thousands to have been submitted and considered for the compendium. Although it has been considered a great distinction within Chinese Muslim scholarly circles for Liu Zhi's name and the title of the book to have earned this "honorable mention" from the imperial commission, the work was hardly remarkable from the perspective of the *Siku quanshu* editors. It was listed in the annotated catalogue because, according to criteria cited above, it qualified as an "extant work of the hundred schools," which may have possessed some "practical value." The editorial review, however, speaks of Liu Zhi's work in terms reminiscent of the description "flashy or meaningless style rather than solid scholarship," qualities that would normally have eliminated a book from inclusion altogether. Moreover, if the Islamic content of the book had been regarded as heretical by orthodox Confucian standards, the *Tianfang dianli* could have found itself ablaze atop a book-burning pyre.

It would appear, however, that the respect Liu Zhi paid to the Confucian tradition, together with his obvious erudition and his elegant prose, helped guarantee the book's preservation and the modicum of recognition it did receive. It is also possible, albeit purely conjectural, that in light of the Muslim violence plaguing the government at the time in western China, the Siku Commission may have wanted to appease the well-behaved, assimilated Muslims of eastern China by acknowledging one of their own. The literary merits and relative orthodoxy of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang dianli* may have earned it a place as the lone token representative of the Han Kitāb in the *Siku quanshu*. The inclusion of Liu Zhi and his *Tianfang dianli* may not have been considered significant at all to the late eighteenth-century official arbiters of orthodoxy and literary value. Yet despite the subordinate placement and ambivalent review of the text, the fact that it appeared at all was of immense importance to the Chinese Muslim community, for whom Liu Zhi's posthumous achievement was, and continues to be, a great source of pride.

The recognition Liu Zhi received from the Siku Commission certainly sealed

the perception of the author as the pre-eminent Chinese Muslim scholar, both within and outside his own community. It also solidified the status of the *Tianfang dianli* as the most famous, if not the most important, of the Han Kitāb books. Yet these distinctions notwithstanding, we may presume that had Liu Zhi lived to read the *Siku quanshu* editor's assessment of his work, he would have been disappointed by its suggestion that his writing offered style but little substance. Ultimately, the text failed to persuade this influential reader of the value of Islam. Liu Zhi and his scholarship ran squarely into the fatal impasse that any non-Confucian religio-philosophical teaching was bound to encounter. He would have been bitterly disappointed to find that the only aspect of his work appreciated by Confucian readers was his ornamental writing style. He would have found the faint praise he received in the *Siku quanshu* hollow and misplaced, a Pyrrhic victory at best. He probably would have felt that he had not achieved his supreme mission of communicating the truth of Islamic teachings and elevating them to an equal status alongside Confucianism. In the end, the *Siku quanshu* entry was the virtual antithesis of the sentiment Liu Zhi expressed in an essay attached to his final book:

I respectfully hope that the gentlemen of this world will remember my humble self not as one whose perceptions were extensive, nor whose expressions ingenious, but whose single ambition was to propound and elucidate orthodox learning, correct any errors in it, and fill whatever was lacking or omitted from it. If my embellishments generally lack grace, it is so that I could achieve a grand vision. And if I am able to bequeath my lesson to eternity, then this is the good fortune of the Way.⁹⁰

CHAPTER 3

LIU ZHI'S CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

It is difficult to single out a particular work by Liu Zhi to the exclusion of the others, for Liu Zhi expected his readers to have read his other writings. Chinese Muslim intellectual readers would likely have been familiar with other Han Kitāb texts. These, of course, included the original writings of Liu Zhi's predecessors, Wang Daiyu and Ma Zhu, and many of the Chinese translations of Islamic texts that were Liu Zhi's sources. Any literate Chinese reader of the time would also have been intimately familiar with the texts of the classical Confucian canon that informed and influenced these writings. Since Liu Zhi assumed this knowledge on the part of his audience, we must, in our analysis of his work, also assume it.

THE “*TIANFANG*” TRILOGY

How then can we justify the choice to focus on the *Tianfang dianli*? A compelling factor in making this choice is its place in Liu Zhi's so-called “*Tianfang* trilogy.”¹ The special attention paid to this grouping of texts is not based upon any random preference. Liu Zhi's own characterization of the relationship among the *Tianfang xingli*, *Tianfang dianli*, and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* justifies using the term “trilogy” and sets these books apart from the rest of his work and, by extension, the entire Han Kitāb corpus. Liu Zhi considered these books “in particular to be the most important products of his work,” and he saw them as integral to his overall scholarly treatment of Islam “as divisible into three inter-related and fundamental components: the metaphysics, the law, and the ‘sage’

Muhammad.”² A clear example of Liu Zhi’s unprecedented systematization of Chinese Islamic scholarship, this manner of dividing Islamic teachings into discrete yet mutually dependent themes demonstrates his conscious attempt “to deal with the thought system in its entirety, dedicating entire books to each of its fundamental aspects.”³

Liu Zhi stressed the importance of these three books in a confessional essay titled “Zhushu shu” (Telling about Writing Books), in which he described his writing process and the toil he associated with it. Written for publication with the last book of the trilogy, the essay represents Liu Zhi’s attempt to identify pattern and method in his thought and writing. We cannot be sure that when he began writing the *Tianfang xingli* he intended it to be the first in a three-part effort to “show the whole world the evidence of the Way in its entirety.”⁴ It is clear, however, that in hindsight he recognized the thread that ran through the texts by the time he was writing the second, the *Tianfang dianli*. Liu Zhi thus referred readers of the *Tianfang dianli* back to the *Tianfang xingli*. He acknowledged that the discussion of Islamic ritual in the later work might raise philosophical or theoretical questions addressed in the earlier one: “If one wishes to understand more deeply the principle behind this work, one may find it in my book on metaphysics, the *Xingli*.”⁵ He thus demonstrated, at the very least, an awareness of the progressive interrelatedness of the first two books years before he wrote the third and the essay contained therein. Whether or not he had a trilogy in mind from the start, it is clear that when he viewed his career retrospectively, Liu Zhi wished to leave as part of his legacy the impression of systematic forethought.

In this essay, Liu Zhi also justified our use of the term “trilogy” when he wrote that “as far as these books are concerned, they are three yet actually constitute one whole.”⁶ From his remarks, it would be difficult to say that he considered one of the books to be more important than the others. He did not place them in a hierarchy nor even suggest an order in which they ought to be read. Rather, it seems clear that he wished to portray them as coequal parts of a magnum opus in which he would present a comprehensive and authoritative view of Islam, made accessible to a sinophone audience.

He recognized that each of the books served a particular role in the overall presentation and thereby complemented the other two. Liu Zhi described this relationship among the works in terms that would have been familiar to a literate Confucian readership, relying in particular on two Chinese terms, *dao* (“way”) and *jiao* (“teaching”), to define the specific functions of each book: “The *dianli* is a book that explains the Teaching. The *xingli* is a book that explains the Way. This edition, the *Zhisheng [shi]lu*, is intended to explain the profound origins of the Teaching and the Way.”⁷

DAO: WAYS AND MEANINGS

Each of the two terms Liu Zhi used to define the scope and function of his works has multiple meanings. These range from the literal to the colloquial to their technical usage within the context of literati religio-philosophical discourse. The term *dao* is one of extremely ancient provenance.⁸ The “Way” is generally understood in two distinct yet interrelated senses: first, as the transcendent force that undergirds all phenomenal reality; and second, as a principle, which when followed harmonizes worldly affairs. This dual sense has afforded the term *dao* a special place in Chinese religio-philosophical thought. In the great synthesis of Chinese ideas that began during the Han dynasty and developed further with the emergence of Neo-Confucianism and Three Teachings syncretism, the concept of the Way achieved paramount status. In many contexts, both scholarly and popular, it stood as one of several bywords commonly used to express the otherwise ineffable notion of transcendent reality, the absolute. In this conceptualization, ultimate reality is understood as an invisible force or abstract entity, which defies facile definition. It may only be referred to by such classical Chinese metaphysical terms as Principle (*li*),⁹ Nature (*xing*), the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*), or sometimes, metaphorically, Heaven (*tian*), all of which express a similar conception and may be interchangeable with *dao* in certain contexts.¹⁰

Although these terms and concepts are all central to Confucian discourse, in many ways this use of the term *dao* finds its most famous expression in the first lines of the *Daodejing*, which emphasize the ineffability of the Way, describing it as the “nameless origin of Heaven and Earth.” And while the predominant understanding of the Way in Chinese thought is overwhelmingly abstract and non-anthropomorphic, the *Daodejing* nevertheless acknowledges the human inclination to name the transcendent, as it continues: “If it were to have a name, it would be ‘mother of the myriad creatures.’”

Use of the term *dao* to designate ultimate reality did not preclude its simultaneous use for more mundane purposes; it may have held a special meaning in religio-philosophical discourse, yet it still retained its literal meaning of “path” or “road.” Whether it is used in the abstract, metaphysical sense or the concrete, physical one is understood by context. Chinese orthography lacks the means to distinguish by capitalization as in the roman alphabet, and the Chinese lexicon lacks the clear distinction of an indefinite versus a definite article, so *dao* means either a “way” or *the* “Way” depending on how it is used. The more generic former sense could also be used to describe an abstract way, that is, a course or method, albeit not the “ultimate” one. As the opening line of the *Daodejing* affirms, “a way that can be expressed is not the eternal Way.” Accordingly, within the infinite purview and realm of *the* Way, there are many subordinate “ways.”

The hierarchical distinction between the transcendent *dao* and qualified, subordinate *dao* was one used to good effect by apologists for various non-indigenous religio-philosophical traditions in China. Beginning with Buddhism and continuing in wave after wave of accommodative writings, representatives of foreign religions cited the “way within the Way” theory to explain the multiplicity of doctrines and practices in the world. Thus they justified their existence beside indigenous Chinese thought and belief systems, especially the hegemonic Confucian tradition. Early Buddhist translators used the term *dao* to correspond to the equally multivalent and nuanced Sanskrit word *dharma*. During the Tang period, the term was again co-opted by another foreign religion when the writer of the Nestorian stele inscription, unearthed in Xi’an, similarly used the term *dao* in its universal sense, while acknowledging that “the Way had not, at all times and in all places, the selfsame name.”¹¹ Proceeding from this premise, he could account for the specificity of the qualified appellation he gave his own religion: the “Victorious Way.”¹²

Chinese Jewish scholars in the Ming period also adroitly used such nuance to construct apologetic and accommodationist treatises about their faith. The earliest known example is a stone inscription dated 1489 from the Kaifeng synagogue. In it a Chinese Jewish literatus named Jin Zhong recounted the history of Judaism: “His [i.e., Ezra’s] way (*tao*) of honouring Heaven and performing worship fully revealed the mysteries of the Way (*Tao*) of the ancestors.”¹³ Once again we see the bifurcation of the term into its relative and absolute senses. In 1512, another Confucian Jew, Zuo Tang, argued that the Jewish faith was completely harmonious with Chinese thought when he wrote that “among all under Heaven who are adherents of the religion [i.e., Judaism] there is none who does not venerate the Scriptures and honour the Way.”¹⁴ And yet, after making this universalistic statement, Zuo Tang proceeded to use the term *dao* in its relative sense, to identify specific differences between the Jewish and Confucian traditions, while also affirming that “on examining their principle (*li*) it is found that their ways (*tao*) of common practice are similar.”¹⁵ In the very next sentence he then reverted to the universal sense of *dao*, describing the social harmony that ensues when the “Way (*Tao*) reigns.”¹⁶

Within a century of these Jewish writings, the Jesuits, led by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), also engaged the Chinese intellectual tradition and its concept of the Way. In his *Tianzhu shiyi* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), Ricci created a dialogue between a Chinese and Western scholar. Illustrating his understanding of both the literal and figurative connotations of the term *dao*, he put into the mouth of his Chinese interlocutor words that evoke the image of a physical “road” (*lu*) as a metaphor for the “Way of [moral] self-cultivation” (*xiuji zhi dao*).¹⁷ He also demonstrated his awareness of the “absolute Way–relative way” dichotomy,

which he, like other foreign apologists, used to discuss the multiplicity of religio-philosophical doctrines. But in contrast to the universal tone struck by the Jewish writers cited above, Ricci insisted on the exclusive truth of Christianity, which he had already correlated with “pure” Confucianism.¹⁸ Thus he spoke of his religion as the one and only “true Way” (*zhendao*).¹⁹ He criticized the late Ming state of affairs that tolerated the coexistence of diverse schools and sects, saying that “[a]lthough each insists that it is the correct [or orthodox] Way, the more ways there are the more strange and confused they become.”²⁰

Chinese literati converts to Christianity of the late Ming period took a slightly different tack from their European Jesuit patrons. Though clearly convinced of the correctness and superiority of Christian doctrine over rival teachings, they were nevertheless willing to include the followers of other sects and schools under the umbrella of the universal Way. For example, writing of the universality of Principle, Yang Tingyun (1562–1627) argued that “whether one is a Confucian or Mohist, a Buddhist or Taoist . . . everyone has to revere the One.”²¹ The same argument justified his choice of Christianity against critics who might have accused him of betraying his Confucian heritage, for by it he could claim that the “Way of the foreigners is indeed the same as the Way of the Ancient Chinese Saints and Sages.”²² Chinese Catholics, whose requirements for survival differed significantly from those of the transplanted Europeans from whom they learned their adopted faith, were not nearly as obstinate in asserting the unique truth of Christianity. Rather, they acknowledged the existence of a transcendent Dao, of which the “Teaching of the Lord of Heaven” was but one, albeit the purest, manifestation.

The writings of Chinese Jews and Chinese Christians in the late Ming dynasty resemble one another, especially with respect to the ideas of universalism and particularism in which the term *dao* figures so prominently. It should not be surprising that when Chinese Muslims began writing about Islam they arrived at similar conceptions. In general, exponents of all three of the Abrahamic traditions in China put forth the same argument that their doctrine was harmonious with, and indeed essentially the same as, the Chinese Way of the ancients. Even so, there were also significant differences between the specific products of Chinese Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholarship.

An emphasis on the notion of scholarship itself distinguished Chinese Islamic apologetic literature from its Jewish and Christian counterparts. The Chinese Jews and Christians whose writings have been passed down to us were almost all Confucian-trained scholars, many of them official degree holders. Yet even while their inscriptions and texts clearly display literati values and thinking, we do not see in them the same emphasis on the enterprise of scholarship, over and above doctrinal assertions, which was an important aspect of the Han Kitāb literature.

Chinese Muslim intellectual activity and literary production, born out of an educational reform movement, occurred within the context of a well-organized, self-aware scholarly network. As such, the representatives of this network deliberately equated their efforts with those of the Confucian literati elite, and the theories they proffered about Islam reflect that perception.

The Han Kitāb scholars focused on scholarship and the production of a body of literature as the criteria that defined the Way. For them, the sage Confucius and his followers through the centuries had established the Way in China precisely through the composition and transmission of the classics and subsequent commentary tradition. As the Muslim literati conceptually equated the status of the sage Muḥammad and the Islamic scriptures with Confucius and the Chinese classics, so too did they identify their own literary tradition with that of the Confucians. Thus Islam became “the study of ‘the Dao of Muhammad,’ one component of the Dao with which *all* Chinese scholars were concerned, and hence a legitimate component of late imperial Chinese intellectual discourse.”²³ This specifically Islamic *dao* was understood as “constituent of a greater Dao comprising all scholarly knowledge”²⁴ and was “presented as part of the total body of Chinese intellectual thought and, in the case of Chinese literati of Muslim ancestry, a vital part of that total.”²⁵

Chinese Muslim scholars justified and legitimized their own enterprise and, beyond that, their place in society by redefining *dao* as “a process of scholarly literary production,” or a body of knowledge, and by positing Islam as the “specific scholarly tradition that encapsulates all prior literary productivity.”²⁶ This idea resembled assertions made by scholars representing other foreign religions who portrayed their teachings as an expression of the universal Way. However, the Chinese Muslim scholars’ portrayal of Islam as “an essential part of” the tradition of the ancient sages is distinguished from Chinese Christian claims that merely aligned Christianity and Confucianism.²⁷ As Ben-Dor points out, the difference is a “matter of degree,”²⁸ as the Han Kitāb writers not only defended their doctrine but also went the extra length to carve out a niche for themselves in Chinese literati society.

This difference may be explained in part by the divergent histories and social circumstances of the three communities of Chinese Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Jews in China, like their Muslim counterparts, were the descendants of foreign immigrants. Where the groups differed, however, was in the degree to which they remained connected to their respective ancestral homelands. Unlike Chinese Muslims, who maintained a living connection to the Islamic heartlands, Chinese Jews (and others, like the Nestorians) were effectively cut off from their co-religionists abroad. As a result, Chinese Judaism was forced to develop independently of Western influence, leading to even greater assimilation than we

find among Chinese Muslim communities. By the Ming period, Chinese Jewry was basically limited to the community of Kaifeng, and it was reduced further by apostasy, both deliberate and attritive. When some Jewish literati of the Kaifeng community finally began to express their identity and devotion to their faith in Chinese writings during the late Ming period, they were already quite distanced from the Jewish scholarly tradition beyond China.

According to Lipman, the Jews of Kaifeng, despite a high degree of acculturation, “becoming Chinese in material life, language, and patterns of thought,” nevertheless tenaciously resisted complete assimilation by maintaining aspects of Jewish ritual and identity. But the community never exceeded “a few thousand souls” and became completely isolated from contact with Jews outside, factors that are cited as “the main causes for the gradually reduced capacity to remain Jewish over the centuries.”²⁹ The Jews of Kaifeng could, in theory, like the Muslims, have maintained contact with the small but vibrant communities of their co-religionists in Central Asia, India, and elsewhere. But unlike the Muslims, they did not. We may only speculate as to why this was so. Jewish communities of Central Asia often thrived under Muslim rule, so it was not that the Chinese Jews had no one there to answer their call on the other end of the line. The question, then, is why the Kaifeng Jews did not reach out in that direction, whereas Muslims did. Attempts by both Muslims and Jews to maintain extensive contacts with their brethren abroad would have been made more difficult under the Ming dynasty, which discouraged foreign travel, trade, and contact. But Ming foreign policy cannot explain why Muslims maintained some contact while Jews apparently did not. There must have been an internal difference distinguishing the communities. One theory is that the *hajj* requirement of Islam, calling all able-bodied Muslims to assemble in Mecca once in a lifetime for the annual pilgrimage, among other things, forced the Chinese Muslims to maintain connections that Jews did not. That Muslims were religiously obligated to travel to the Islamic heartland also facilitated ongoing trade relations. The Jewish sense of exile from Israel, and the absence of a central pilgrimage site since the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, precluded any such regularly scheduled religious “ingathering.” Beyond this, however, as compared with the Chinese Muslim communities, the Kaifeng Jewish population was quite small. Perhaps, in the end, size made all the difference, and there simply was not a critical mass of Jews in China to do the difficult work of maintaining the connection.

Muslim scholars, by contrast, retained a link to Islam abroad and, nearly a century after the first of the Kaifeng synagogue inscriptions, benefited from an infusion of texts and learning brought from the West, which helped catalyze the Jingtang educational reforms. In the writings they produced, Chinese Jewish scholars, like their Muslim counterparts, correlated the concept of the Way with

that of a literary tradition of scholarship, as evinced by Zuo Tang's statement: "It is commonly said that the Scriptures (or "Classics") were for the purpose of communicating the Way."³⁰ However, Chinese Jewish scholars never produced a body of literature comparable to the Han Kitāb. There is speculation about a collection of Jewish texts in Chinese, based on recorded titles of books now lost, but the bulk of the extant Chinese Jewish writings are inscriptions and genealogical tables.³¹ We may easily understand, then, why Chinese Muslim scholars took such great pride in their literary accomplishments, which distinguished Islam from other foreign religious traditions and drew them closer to the Chinese literati.³²

The situation of Chinese Christians differs from that of the Muslims and Jews in one significant way. In the late Ming–early Qing period, with the disappearance of the Nestorian community,³³ the only identifiable group of Christians in China were either European missionaries or their Chinese converts. The Jesuit missionaries, seeking accommodation with the Chinese elite, portrayed themselves as "Western literati" (*xiru*). The Jesuits' scientific and technical expertise dazzled members of the imperial court and elite society, who enjoyed the Jesuits as curiosities. Some, like Ricci, earned the genuine respect of Chinese intellectuals for their mastery of the Chinese language. But even so, the Jesuits were never regarded as being on a par with Chinese literati. Their foreignness, the fact that they remained beyond the pale of Confucian society due to religious practices, such as celibacy, that separated them from society, presented an insurmountable obstacle to complete naturalization in the eyes of most Chinese observers. For their part, the Jesuits saw Chinese scholarship, with all of its trappings, not as an end in itself, but as a means to their missionary goals. They became sinicized not out of affection for Chinese literati culture per se, but to ingratiate themselves with Chinese high society. It therefore would not have occurred to them to define *dao* in terms of scholarship or literary production, as the Muslim scholars, who were not merely sinicized but actually Chinese, did. As for the converts to Christianity, they were Chinese by birth and most of them were members of the literati elite before their conversion. They therefore had no need to emphasize either their "Chineseness" or their scholarly pedigree. Their focus instead was on justifying their choice to convert by defending Christian teachings in their apologia. Thus they tended to define the term *dao*, whether in its absolute or relative sense, as principle or doctrine, but not specifically in terms of scholarship as we find in the Han Kitāb texts.

The Han Kitāb scholars, like their Jewish and Christian counterparts, similarly struck a balance between particular and universal conceptions of *dao*. Ma Zhu implied a universal *dao* that unites and harmonizes its various geographical and historical manifestations: "[T]he Way of the sages of the western regions and the Way of the sages of China are identical."³⁴ In the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi

similarly employed the concept of the *dao* to express the union of the relative and the absolute, equating the microcosmic and macrocosmic ideals: “The Way of the sage is none other than the Way of Heaven.”³⁵ Chinese Muslim scholars may have differed from the apologists of other religio-philosophical traditions, placing special emphasis on their definition of *dao* as a scholarly path, but in their general usage of Chinese terms and concepts they showed themselves to be equal participants in the intellectual discourse of their day.

JIAO: RELIGIOUS TEACHING

Liu Zhi also used the term *jiao* to define the object of his writing. Like *dao*, *jiao* is a word pregnant with meaning and frequently redefined in the palimpsest of Chinese religio-philosophical discourse. While the earliest usage of *jiao* was as a verb meaning to “discipline” or “instruct,” the word eventually came to be understood also as a noun, becoming a generic term for any form of “instruction” or “teaching.”³⁶ The noun *jiao* occupies an essential place in the Chinese religio-philosophical lexicon, where it may refer to a religious tradition or sect, or to a particular teaching or doctrine within a religious or philosophical tradition. When referring to an entire tradition, this term may be translated either generically or specifically (i.e., as “a teaching,” or as “the Teaching”) depending on the context in which it appears. In its generic sense, *jiao* refers to a teaching seen as one among many, making possible such formulations as San Jiao, the “Three Teachings” of Chinese culture.

The generic *jiao* of Chinese syntax captures the multiplicity of teachings in the world of ideas. Philosophically, however, Chinese culture has sought to harmonize the diversity of teachings, as expressed in the syncretic motto “The Three Teachings are one Teaching” (*Sanjiao yijiao ye*). The search for the “One Teaching” among the many was inspired in some Ming and Qing dynasty Chinese intellectuals by a sincere yearning for genuine metaphysical harmony. An even more powerful impulse might have been the desire for conformity—for ideological uniformity and its correlative social order. Confucians who sought accommodation with other teachings were motivated by the wish to eliminate the chaos of diversity, to expand the umbrella of orthodoxy in order to limit the encroachment of heterodoxy. Conversely, representatives of non-Confucian religio-philosophical traditions might have sought security and legitimation under such an umbrella. In late imperial China, though Confucianism, in its Neo-Confucian form, retained its hegemonic monopoly on the term “orthodoxy,” other teachings sought accommodation with it by projecting their own status as “orthodox teaching” (*zhengjiao*).

Each of the three Abrahamic traditions attempted to posit itself thus as co-orthodoxy beside Confucianism. In the 1489 inscription from the Kaifeng synagogue, Jin Zhong used the term *zhengjiao* to describe Judaism as the teaching

that was originally pursued by the patriarch Abraham, transmitted through Moses, and finally reached China.³⁷ About a century later, as the Jesuits were beginning their mission to bring the Chinese people to Catholicism, the Dominican missionary Juan Cobo published a Chinese translation of his work of Christian apologetics under the title *Bian zhengjiao zhenchuan shilu* (Veritable Records of the True Transmission of the Differentiation of Orthodox Teaching). Although they were members of rival missionary orders, the Jesuit Ricci may well have been influenced by Cobo's work, particularly the manner in which he portrayed Christianity as orthodoxy in Chinese. The Chinese Muslim scholars who produced the Han Kitāb literature were no less interested in portraying their teaching as ideologically correct within the Confucian context, using the same term, *zhengjiao*, to describe Islam; the most famous such usage was by Wang Daiyu in the title (and throughout the text) of his *Zhengjiao zhenquan* (True Answers of the Orthodox Teaching).

Liu Zhi joined this chorus as he discussed the history of Islam, in his words the "original Teaching" (*yuanjiao*). Recounting the chain of transmission of sages, beginning with Adam, he reached the "ultimate sage" (*zhisheng*), Muḥammad, who "clearly manifested the orthodox Teaching to initiate an era of great peace and harmony for ten thousand generations."³⁸ For Liu Zhi, Islam was both the Teaching of the ultimate sage and the "original Teaching," for God had revealed it to the first human being, the sage Adam. It had been the "orthodox Teaching" from the beginning of history, but this orthodoxy needed to be restored periodically after it had been corrupted. The teaching of the sage Muḥammad is the most recent and ultimate restoration of orthodoxy. According to Liu Zhi, there is but one original Teaching, and any other doctrine that may claim the designation "orthodoxy," including the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages and Confucius, is derived from it. Based on this premise, Liu Zhi, seeking to explain the existence of multiple teachings, could assert that "of all the many teachings all over the world, most are not the ancient Teaching."³⁹ Thus, he not only implied that Islam is a manifestation of the most ancient tradition, but he also left open the possibility of interpreting Confucianism as another manifestation of that primordial tradition.

In its generic sense, *jiao* frequently takes a noun or adjective before it as a modifier and specifier, as in the examples above. By extension of its meaning of "tradition" or "sect," *jiao* commonly serves as a suffix, modified by a prefix representing or describing a specific religious or philosophical teaching. Such names may describe a defining feature, usually a practice or the object of devotion, of the tradition. For example, the common name for Confucianism, *Rujiao*, literally means the "Teaching of the Literati." Alternatively, Confucianism is also known as *Kongjiao*, the "Teaching of Confucius," or *Dajiao*, the "Great Teaching."⁴⁰ The

former is an example of a prefix being derived from the name of the founder of the tradition (*jiaozhu*), while the latter typifies the sort of subjective name applied to a tradition by its own adherents. In contrast to such eulogistic names are the descriptive, and sometimes less than flattering, appellations given to foreign religions by Chinese observers. These often were based on what the Chinese saw as the essential feature of the tradition in question, though in some cases they simply employed the ethnonym of the people with whom the teaching was associated.

THE CLASSICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAO AND JIAO

In its usage to convey the idea of a single, “orthodox” teaching, *jiao* (which we may reflect by means of capitalization: “*the Teaching*”), is attached to the notion of the immutable, universal Principle of truth. This usage thus overlaps with the notion of *dao* as “*the Way*” (or *li* as “*the Principle*”), as we saw in the “absolute-relative” dichotomy above. These two terms, *dao* and *jiao*, often appear together in Chinese texts, indicating their special connection in Chinese thought. The relationship between the concepts of the Way and the Teaching, sometimes complicated by imprecise and inconsistent usages, is crucial to our understanding of Liu Zhi’s ideas, because he relied so heavily on the connection between these concepts to explain his purpose for writing his three most important texts. It is on the basis of the conceptual connection between *dao* and *jiao* that the *Tianfang xingli*, *Tianfang dianli*, and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* constitute a “trilogy.”

In order to understand how and why Liu Zhi used these terms as he did, we must look into the background of the relationship between these concepts in the Chinese tradition to which he was heir and which informed his thought and writing. Liu Zhi actually leads us indirectly to the *locus classicus* for the interconnection of *dao* and *jiao* by quoting a Han Kitāb scholar from the generation that preceded him. In the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi cited an essay by Ding Peng (fl. 1650–1695)⁴¹ titled “*Tianfang sheng xu*” (Introduction to the Sage of Islam).⁴² The passage Liu Zhi quoted refers to the “Three Teachings” of China, which it admits are of “ancient origin.” But it also asserts that Islam, as compared with other doctrines, is “the truest of all.”⁴³ Of course, Ding Peng, writing as a Muslim scholar, might be expected to show such bias. However, he was also a Confucian literatus, a *jinshi* degree holder in fact. Thus, in extolling the virtues of Islam, he made the claim seen so often in the Han Kitāb canon, that Islam “is not different from our own Confucianism.”⁴⁴

All the Han Kitāb writers invoked the Confucian classics in their texts because that was the only way to write persuasive ideological prose in the Chinese cultural context.⁴⁵ As Muslims, these scholars naturally also made reference to the Islamic

canon. As a good Confucian, Ding Peng peppered his prose with quotations from the classics, including, in this preface, the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) and *Shijing* (Book of Odes). Later, in a 1691 preface to a book called the *Jiaokuan weilun* (Discussion of the Subtleties of the Particulars of the Teaching), by Mi Wanji,⁴⁶ Ding Peng initiated a discussion of Islam by citing another Confucian classic, quoting from the first passage of the *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the Mean) a line frequently acknowledged as the definitive source for the correlation between the concepts of *dao* and *jiao*.

The *Zhongyong* is, of course, one of the so-called “Four Books,” the foundational texts of the Confucian canon, as established by the Song period arbiters of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy. There is nothing primordial about the canonical status of the Four Books. In fact, we can even say that the *Zhongyong* became one of the foundational texts of the canon because influential Song period Neo-Confucian scholars chose it as such. Until then, like the *Daxue*, it was a relatively obscure chapter of the Zhou period *Liji* (Book of Rites).⁴⁷ Despite its connection with other ancient texts associated with ritual, the *Zhongyong* is far from a book of ritual prescriptions or a manual of ritual practice. Rather, it deals with ritual by focusing on its inner dimension as a method for self-cultivation in order to achieve moral, psychological, and metaphysical concord between the individual and the cosmos. In Confucian terms, used frequently by Liu Zhi, this ideal is expressed as the “the complete union of Man and Heaven.” Wing-tsit Chan has described the *Zhongyong* as “religious and mystical” and as a book that “formed a bridge” between the Three Teachings.⁴⁸ He identified its two main subjects as “the very subjects on which Confucius’ pupils ‘could not hear his views,’ namely human nature and the Way of Heaven.”⁴⁹ Accordingly, in dealing with this notion of the universal *dao*, the *Zhongyong* seems to circumvent Confucius’ dictum against undue speculation into spiritual matters and delves deeply into issues of metaphysical transcendence. As such, the book anticipated and later fueled the speculative philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, becoming one of its central texts. The *Zhongyong*’s peculiar and peripheral concerns, from the more narrow perspective of Zhou through Han period ideology, became central in the developing Three Teachings intellectual milieu of the Tang and post-Tang periods, which generated Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism under the Song dynasty.

Its exploration of metaphysical topics notwithstanding, “[i]n the final analysis, the *Doctrine of the Mean* is a Confucian document, and as such it has never deviated from its central interest in practical affairs,” for it teaches that in order to cultivate ethical virtues, especially sincerity (*cheng*), one must exert “strenuous effort at learning and earnest effort at practice.”⁵⁰ However, insofar as it addresses both metaphysical and physical realities, the *Zhongyong* represents the joining of several related dichotomies: abstract-concrete, absolute-relative, and

theoretical-practical. It is in this context that the text employs the terms *dao* and *jiao* and implies a distinct relationship between them. The centrality of this connection to the scope and message of the text is reflected in its opening lines: "That which Heaven decrees is called 'Nature'; that which follows Nature is called the 'Way'; that which cultivates the Way is called the 'Teaching.'"⁵¹ The last line of this passage, "that which cultivates the Way is called the 'Teaching,'" is the seminal statement within the Confucian classical tradition that establishes the symbiotic interconnection of the two concepts. In this connection, *dao* is the abstract, absolute, and theoretical underpinning of *jiao*, and *jiao* is the concrete, relative, and practical vehicle whereby *dao* is manifested in the world.

We have already seen above the common usage of the term *dao* in the various schools of Chinese thought to refer to the abstract principle of transcendent reality. This conception, originally derived from early Daoist philosophy before being assimilated by Confucianism, is replete with mystical paradox; the Way is simultaneously transcendent and immanent, operating both beyond the world as the force of cosmic order, as well as on the most intimate human level. In Confucian discourse this bifurcation was made explicit by qualifying the term *dao* as either the Way of Heaven (*tiandao*) or the Way of Man (*rendao*), positing the idealized human figure of the sage as the linchpin between them, whose mediation brings the two into harmony. The means by which the sage effects this bridging of the macrocosm and microcosm is none other than the *jiao*, his Teaching.

We are reminded that the term *jiao* contains a verbal core. As such, rooted in the meaning "to instruct," *jiao* as a noun, even when it refers to a doctrine, retains a distinctly physical, practical connotation. That is, the Teaching is something to be established (*li*), or put into practice (*xing*). This implementation, by the sage and his followers, was the method by which the abstract Way was made accessible to people and cultivated (*xiu*). We see these constructions repeated constantly in Chinese religio-philosophical discourse, wherever the ideas of the transcendent Way and the proper course of human behavior are concerned. This relationship between the Way and the Teaching, mediated by the sage, was also the means whereby the timeless realm of the Dao is brought into connection with temporal human concerns. As such, although the particular Teaching of a specific sage is invariably circumscribed by its historical context, it is nevertheless in direct contact with something eternal and unchanging. This idea was expressed by the first ruler of the Ming dynasty, the Hongwu emperor (r. 1368–1399), as he addressed the multiplicity of teachings:

It is well known that under Heaven there is no duality in the Way and that the sages are essentially of one mind. They differ only on the

question of personal praxis or participation in public life. In that they deliver real benefits, they are in principle all one.⁵²

In addition to emperors and scholars of the Three Teachings, representatives of foreign religious traditions in China also upheld this notion of the relationship between *dao* and *jiao*. For example, in his 1512 inscription from the Kaifeng synagogue, Zuo Tang asked rhetorically, “What is the Way?” Though written in the specific context of Judaism, his answer echoes the Hongwu emperor’s view of the universal Way and its practical implementation in the world: “It is a principle (*li*) of daily usage and common practice which has been followed by all men from antiquity to the present.”⁵³ While he did not explicitly use the catchword *jiao*, its traces in the term “common practice” (*changxing*) are unmistakable. In another passage, Zuo Tang did make the connection explicit, putting the two terms *dao* and *jiao* side by side. As the Chinese Muslim scholar Ding Peng would do more than a century later, Zuo Tang showed his reverence for the Confucian canon as he quoted the opening passage of the *Zhongyong*, injecting his own embellishments:

Therefore it is, that from what “Heaven decrees,” and that which “accords with Nature,” there is perfection; and that from the “Teaching that cultivates the Way,” there is progress; and from the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom, there is preservation.⁵⁴

Other Jewish scholars similarly invoked the classical tradition. Among the aphoristic couplets that adorned the pillars of the Kaifeng synagogue were several that referred to the relationship between the Way and the Teaching, illustrating a Jewish perspective completely consistent with the Confucian understanding of the concepts. In one of these, a Jewish scholar named Ai Fusheng captured the essence of the “abstract-concrete” dichotomy of the *dao-jiao* dyad, as he wrote:

In using the Way to unite Heaven, Earth, Man and Creatures, we do not think of its name or form. In establishing the Teaching for the harmony of the Sovereign, Parent, Master and Friend, we are not concerned with abstractions.⁵⁵

In another couplet he expressed his understanding of the role of the sage as the disseminator of the Teaching, and as the mediator of the Way between Heaven and humankind: “The Way has its source in Heaven . . . the Teaching venerates the Sage.”⁵⁶ These homiletic inscriptions, which if removed from their specific Jewish

context could scarcely be distinguished from standard Confucian rhetoric, demonstrate well the degree to which the Chinese Jews of Kaifeng were assimilated and integrated into the intellectual discourse of Ming China.

Of course, the question arises whether or not the Chinese Jewish writers, or their Christian and Muslim counterparts after them, truly “believed” in the Confucian values they were transmitting in such apologia, or whether they “might have been dissembling in order to make Judaism (or Christianity or Islam) more Chinese than it ‘actually’ could be.”⁵⁷ The overtly Confucian style of these Abrahamic writings does not necessarily prove anything about the inner faith and motivations of their writers or how deeply their “Chineseness” ran. It does, however, indicate that these men knew how to speak and write persuasive Confucian rhetoric, which they knew was *de rigueur* if they wished to be perceived as civilized. They had no recourse but to use that vocabulary, that diction, and those classical allusions to express their beliefs. We may speculate that they were doing their best with what they knew to be an imperfect tool. It is possible that these external expressions differed from their internal consciousness and faith, which might not have been in such total conformity with the Confucian *dao* and *jiao*. But, as Lipman points out about Jin Zhong, the author of 1489 inscription at the Kaifeng synagogue, at very least, he “studied the Confucian texts all of his life” and “therefore had invested himself heavily in being Chinese, while at the same time belonging to and even leading” his community.⁵⁸ It would be hard to imagine that the Chinese Abrahamic writers (if we can generalize about them as such for a moment) were conspiratorially dissimulating their contempt for Confucian teachings in the face of such profound simultaneity. More likely, these individuals did revere, to some degree (varying from one individual to another), the Confucian teachings they used, though they surely interpreted these through the specific lens of their own communal and sectarian allegiances.

Christians also employed the terminology of the Way and Teaching in their apologetic writings. Speaking of the diversity of religious expression in the world in the *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci reiterated the universality of the Way, notwithstanding the differences that exist among particular practices: “People’s striving with respect to the Teaching of the Sages is invariably different. Therefore, although we can say that there is but one Way, we cannot say the same of their customs.”⁵⁹

In the late Ming and early Qing periods, the Chinese Muslim scholars associated with the Han Kitāb produced literary expressions of their faith and practice that mirrored in many ways the efforts of their Chinese Jewish and Christian counterparts. These Confucianized Muslim literati may have entered the medley of Chinese religio-philosophical discourse slightly later than either the Jews or Christians, but what they lacked in precocity, they more than made up for in the volume and scope of their work.

THE *DAO-JIAO* DICHOTOMY IN LIU ZHI'S WRITINGS

Liu Zhi's novel way of treating established concepts is typified by his particular use of the terms *dao* and *jiao*. These terms were certainly employed by previous Han Kitāb scholars, but Liu Zhi was especially thorough, first in providing a context for their usage, and second in using these important Chinese religio-philosophical notions to frame the scope of an entire body of scholarly work. Although Liu Zhi's debt to the previous generations of Chinese Muslim scholars is easily inferred from his writings, neither the names of Wang Daiyu or Ma Zhu nor specific titles written by them appear anywhere in the *Tianfang dianli*. Liu Zhi did, however, mention Ding Peng by name in the first chapter, titled "Yuanjiao pian" (Chapter on the Original Teaching),⁶⁰ where he quoted directly from the first of two known prefaces by him.⁶¹ We therefore need not speculate about the direct influence Ding Peng had upon Liu Zhi, for the connection between the two scholars is well documented. Like Ding Peng, Liu Zhi alluded to and quoted from classical Confucian sources extensively, including the *Zhongyong*. These two Han Kitāb writers demonstrated a similar understanding of the relationship between the concepts of the Way and the Teaching, which is so prominently expressed in the classical Confucian tradition.

Using the opening lines of the *Zhongyong* as a point of departure, Ding Peng had embarked on a succinct yet comprehensive discussion of Islam as a Teaching promulgated by a sage and animated by the universal Way. In the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi explored the same ideas but expressed the relationship of *dao* and *jiao* even more directly. Thus, whereas Ding Peng had written that if "the Teaching is not cultivated, it is not clearly understood; if the Way is not taught, it is not manifested," Liu Zhi succinctly declared, "If not for the Teaching, the Way would not be clearly understood."⁶²

Thus, Liu Zhi demonstrated the necessary relationship between *dao* and *jiao*, in which the latter manifests the former and allows it to be expressed clearly in the world. In this way, he followed Ding Peng and the other Han Kitāb writers, as well as the greater classical Chinese tradition that informed them all. However, in the sentence that follows, instead of reproducing the bilateral symmetry of Ding Peng's statement, where the second line reverses the order of *dao* and *jiao* to show their interdependence, Liu Zhi, as innovator, introduced a new wrinkle to the discourse: "If not for the law, the Teaching could not be firmly established."⁶³

FA: LIU ZHI'S LAWFUL INNOVATION

Liu Zhi introduced this new element, "the law" (*fa*), which is necessary to the establishment of the Teaching just as the Teaching is necessary to the elucidation of

the Way, thus positing an innovative *dao-jiao-fa* triad. In order to make sense for his readers of this shift from the more traditional *dao-jiao* dyad, he defined each concept in relation to the others:

The Way is the standard for how things ought to be according to the Principle of Heaven. The Teaching is that which shows people how to obey the law, and to practice it. The law is that which distinguishes the Principle of Heaven from human desires, and differentiates right from wrong, and regulates the people of the world into a state without transgression.⁶⁴

The notion of symbiosis and interdependence found in the dyad model is retained. The Way is still seen as something absolute and transcendent, associated with the abstract Principle of Heaven. And the Teaching is still presented as something concrete, residing squarely within the realm of practical, worldly concerns. Yet, as if to address the perennial metaphysical dilemma of how the transcendent and absolute can relate to the temporal and relative, Liu Zhi introduced the concept of the “law” as a bridge between the two poles of the Way and the Teaching. This conceptual device assures that the Way of Heaven does not lose its integrity as it is transposed into a Teaching promulgated by imperfect human beings.

The term Liu Zhi employed for this mediating element, *fa*, has its own range of nuanced meaning and usages in Chinese religio-philosophical discourse. In its most colloquial sense, *fa* can mean a method, or it can refer generally to legal matters, as in the compound *falü*, a “law” or “statute.” In its most ancient use, however, *fa* was a term strongly associated with the concept of ritual (*li*).⁶⁵ In the early Confucian tradition, *fa* represented a number of interrelated concepts. In the classics it sometimes conveyed the sense of a “model,” from its meaning as “moral standard,” or in its verbal form “to model” or “imitate.” This meaning appears in connection with the figure of the sage who models his conduct on the Way of Heaven. As the moral standard for humankind, the sage serves as the “model” for future generations, especially for rulers. The moral example and ethical behavior of the ideal ruler are in turn imitated by his subjects, as described in the *Daxue*: “Only when one is a worthy model as father, son, elder brother and younger brother, will the people model themselves after him.”⁶⁶ In this manner, the model becomes a legal precedent before being codified as the law of the land. This idea is expressed in the *Zhongyong*: “Thus it is that the sovereign’s actions serve for generations as the Way of all under Heaven, and his practices serve for generations as the law of all under Heaven.”⁶⁷

This understanding of *fa* as law, based on the actions of an exemplary ancestor, runs deep through the Confucian tradition. Mencius used it frequently to

express the notion that the ancient sages are to serve as the models for later generations.⁶⁸ Mencius also emphasized the belief that morality is an example set by those at the top of the social hierarchy, who derived their authority from Heaven, and is to be followed by those below: "If those above do not have the Way to consider, those below will have no law to obey."⁶⁹ For Mencius and later Confucians, the ideal relationship between moral law and the Way is ultimately decreed by Heaven: "The sovereign establishes the standard and implements the law, but after that the matter rests with the mandate, and that is all."⁷⁰

This idea that the moral standard derived from the Way of Heaven is to become the norm for human society was not exclusive to Confucianism. It was also expressed in Daoist philosophy: "Human beings follow the model of the Earth; the Earth follows the model of Heaven; Heaven follows the model of the Way, and the Way is a model unto itself."⁷¹ The notion of *fa* as the moral standard is thus a pan-Chinese one. However, the Confucian understanding of *fa* has naturally evolved from a ritual one into a moral one, and then into a statutory one. Daoism, on the other hand, has frequently taken a distinctly antinomian posture, advocating that a ruler govern by an example of benevolent detachment rather than by conventional laws based on fear of punishment.⁷²

At the opposite end of the Chinese philosophical spectrum from Daoism, the term *fa* developed an increasingly concrete legalistic meaning in association with the doctrines of the third-century BCE philosopher Han Feizi, whose followers were known collectively as Fajia, the "Legalist School." The Legalists were known for advocating a draconian legal code enforced by severe punishments, in contrast to the orthodox Confucian program of encouraging maintenance of the social order by appealing to people's ethical nature. Thus, in connection with the doctrines of Legalism, the term *fa* also became associated with the idea of formalism and the "letter of the law." A complete stigmatization of the term was prevented, however, by the prevailing Confucian usage of *fa*, following the tradition of Mencius, to designate law based on the moral standard of benevolent government exemplified by the ancient sages.⁷³

The arrival of Buddhism in China further altered the historical usage of the term *fa*, which was one of many terms used in the early centuries to translate key Buddhist concepts into Chinese. Eventually *fa* became the preferred and most common translation of the Sanskrit term *dharma*, in its sense as the law taught by the Buddha. Due to the centrality of *dharma* in Buddhist thought, *fa* ultimately became synonymous with anything Buddhist.⁷⁴

By the time Liu Zhi co-opted the term *fa* to join with *dao* and *jiao* in his explanation of the "Way," the "Teaching," and the "law" of Islam, all of its many semantic associations were already well established. Thus readers versed in the Chinese intellectual tradition would have been familiar with the nuances of the

term. The traditional Chinese association of *fa* with ritual, as the moral underpinning of practice and conduct, certainly gave the term great appeal to Liu Zhi in the context of the *Tianfang dianli*, which is principally a book concerned with Islamic ritual. The introduction of *fa* as “law,” alongside the concepts of the “Way” and the “Teaching,” was particularly well suited to this specialized discourse on practical and legal matters in Islam. *Dao* and *jiao* had already been integrated into earlier Han Kitāb literature. Liu Zhi inherited this usage and built upon it as a foundation. By introducing the concept of *fa*, he embarked on a new discussion, covering a different aspect of Islamic learning. The *Tianfang dianli* became the quintessential book on Islamic ritual in Chinese and the only text within the entire Han Kitāb corpus to focus exclusively on religious praxis.

Liu Zhi's innovative use of the “law” as a conceptual bridge between the “Way” and the “Teaching” called upon the multiple connotations of the term *fa*. However, like *dao* and *jiao*, *fa* was not really a one-to-one translation of any single corresponding term in Arabic or Persian. These concepts belonged properly to Chinese intellectual discourse, where their many nuances are automatically understood by any literary reader but which represent a range of terms in the Islamic intellectual lexicon. We may roughly translate Liu Zhi's use of *fa* as “the law,” but this does not correspond exactly to the Arabic term most commonly given the same translation in English, namely *sharī'a*. In the orthodox Islamic tradition, *sharī'a* is considered to be *the* law of Islam, a reflection of the will of God for how all human affairs are to be conducted, as revealed in the Qur'ān and the teachings of the Prophet, the Sunna. The *sharī'a* is an abstract representation of the ultimate, unique legal authority in Islam, divinely decreed and knowable to humankind through God's revelations. But it must be extracted from the sacred sources and interpreted by scholars, specifically those expert in the classical discipline of Islamic jurisprudence (Ar. *fiqh*). In the broadest sense, in the discourse of legal-minded Muslims, *sharī'a* is sometimes even used as a synonym for *dīn*, or “religion,” referring to Islam as a comprehensive system of praxis.

Sharī'a is also an important component of Sufi discourse. The basic practices of the Five Pillars, and the myriad legal prescriptions and proscriptions in the life of ordinary Muslims, were seen by Sufi theorists as the first step on the spiritual path, and so most Sufis “did not reject the religious law but rather added to it—additions that made more exacting demands on their personal lives.”⁷⁵ The hierarchy of spiritual progress as described in Sufi literature is generally divided into three ascending, interdependent levels: *sharī'a* (“law”), *ṭarīqa* (the “mystic path”), and *ḥaqīqa* (“truth”).⁷⁶

The strong influence of theoretical Sufi writings on Liu Zhi is evident in the *Tianfang dianli*, where his use of the concept of “law” incorporates the Sufi tripartite division of spiritual progress, as he wrote “the law has three vehicles.”⁷⁷ Liu

Zhi described the concept of the “vehicles” within the theoretical Sufi framework he had adopted: “A vehicle bears a load. These vehicles bear all manner of standards and morals in order to enable the seekers of the Way incrementally to embrace the law.”⁷⁸ He then proceeded to define these “vehicles” in ascending order:

The first is called the vehicle of ritual. (In Arabic it is called the *sharī'a*.) It fully contains the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man. It is the regulation of every matter and deed. This is the means of adopting the law for the one who is diligent in cultivating virtue and who respects his own vocation.⁷⁹

Liu Zhi clearly embraced the Sufi view that considered the *sharī'a* to be the first stage in a program of spiritual progress. By referring to *sharī'a* as the “vehicle of ritual” (*lisheng*), he created an association with Islamic orthopraxy. This “vehicle,” being the first in an incremental, ascending hierarchy, may be regarded as the most important, as confirmed by the claim that it “fully contains the Way of Heaven and the Way of Man.” But for Liu Zhi it was only the first of three interdependent levels.

Liu Zhi wrote that collectively the three vehicles “enable the seekers of the Way incrementally to embrace the law,” but, unfortunately, he never spelled out the specific interactions between the various philosophical terms he used. Consequently, the concepts they represent sometimes overlap each other, admitting some ambiguity into his discourse. In his attempt to syncretize Islamic, Confucian, and other Chinese terminology, Liu Zhi demonstrated no interest in making a clear distinction between what might in other discursive contexts be distinguished as either “exoteric” or “esoteric” concepts. Indeed, as we have seen above, by Liu Zhi’s time, the distinction between mystical and nonmystical teachings had already been blurred in the Islamic intellectual tradition. Similarly, in the Confucian-Daoist-Buddhist intellectual culture, beginning in the Song and continuing in the Ming-Qing periods, the distinction between exoteric and esoteric philosophy had little value, since the ideal person, the sage and anyone emulating his example, would effortlessly practice both. Liu Zhi’s syncretic discourse blended these already syncretized notions of belief and practice coming from both sides of his cultural and intellectual heritage.

As he continued this discussion, Liu Zhi further mingled the Sufi notion of fulfilling human potentiality vis-à-vis the divine and the Confucian ideal of self-cultivation. Thus he defined the second stage of spiritual progress as

the vehicle of the Way.⁸⁰ (In Arabic it is called *ṭarīqa*.) It is the stage of the law that fully contains the universal Principle of Man and of all

phenomena, as well as the completion of human potentiality in accordance with Heaven. This is the means of adopting the law for the one who probes Principle and completes Nature.⁸¹

In keeping with the Sufi understanding of the highest level of spiritual attainment as the devotee's relinquishing the illusion of ego to enter into union with the divine, Liu Zhi described the third and final stage as

the vehicle of Principle, also called the "vehicle of truth." (In Arabic it is called *ḥaqīqa*.) It fully contains the concepts of "no-self" and "no-thing."⁸² It contains the subtle words and the symbolic language of the total integration of Man and Heaven. This is the means of adopting the law for the one who restrains his ego⁸³ and completes the truth.⁸⁴

Finally, after reiterating his message about the need to restrain selfish desires in order to achieve spiritual enlightenment, Liu Zhi concluded the discussion of the three vehicles with a statement about the totality of the law, which transcends even the highest of the spiritual levels he had just described:

The law of three vehicles is the method for disciplining of selfish desires. Yet, above the three vehicles there is the single law of a supreme, transcendent vehicle, by which Heaven and Man may be transformed and merged. At this level names and appearances are dissolved. This state cannot be communicated by spoken or written language. Only the individual himself can fully understand it, and then only experientially.⁸⁵

Thus Liu Zhi's discussion of the law comes full circle. This concept, to which he referred by the Chinese term *fa*, encompasses the Islamic concept of *sharī'a* and more. It encompasses the tripartite Sufi spiritual path, which allows the devotee to ascend from the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of *sharī'a*, through the mystic practices of *ṭarīqa*, all the way to the rarified heights of spiritual awakening on the level of *ḥaqīqa*. Transcending even this highest level of attainment in classical Sufi thought, however, Liu Zhi posits a supreme dimension. The law, treated in these terms, is then reminiscent of the concept of the transcendent Way in Chinese thought. This association brings us back to Liu Zhi's original proposition: that the law is the "vehicle" mediating between the temporal, relative Teaching and the eternal, absolute Way.

The Chinese term *fa* encompasses a wide range of nuanced, related meanings, which Liu Zhi seems to have recognized and incorporated into his usage.

He described the law as that which “differentiates right from wrong.”⁸⁶ This description evokes the Arabic term *furqān*, which literally means “that which distinguishes,” or “criterion.” *Al-Furqān* is the title of the twenty-fifth *sūra* of the Qur’ān, so named for its first verse: “Blessed is He who revealed the Criterion to His Servant, that it might be an admonition to the worlds.”⁸⁷ Based on this verse, Muslim exegetes have interpreted *furqān* as an alternate appellation for the entire Qur’ānic revelation. The Han Kitāb scholars similarly used this Arabic term (transliterated in Chinese) to refer to the idea, utterly alien to the Confucian tradition, of revealed scripture.⁸⁸ Liu Zhi used it as such in the *Tianfang dianli*: “The True Master revealed to him [Muḥammad] six thousand six hundred and sixty-six chapters called the *Fu’erjiani*.”⁸⁹ Thus, by means of a Chinese concept, *fa*, equivalent to the Islamic concept of *furqān*, Liu Zhi introduced the notion of the sage/prophet as the conduit of the law, who established a Teaching in order to connect people to the Way.

BRIDGING THE METAPHYSICAL GAP

Liu Zhi’s use of the term *fa* to link *dao* and *jiao* was a lexical innovation in Chinese Muslim scholarly discourse and moreover reflects the conceptual need to bridge the metaphysical gap that exists between the idea of the transcendent Way and the world-bound Teaching. This metaphysical gap, and the attempt to bridge it, points to an even more profound idea that is central to Liu Zhi’s Confucian-Islamic syncretism. This is nothing short of Liu Zhi’s understanding of the purpose of existence: “The complete union of Man and Heaven,” which appears as a through line in the *Tianfang dianli*, reiterated in numerous variations and formulations throughout the text. Indeed, as one of the book’s preface writers, Jing Rifen, aptly described Liu Zhi’s metaphysical point of view: “Generally speaking, he holds the *complete union of Heaven and Man* to be the essential Way.”⁹⁰

According to Liu Zhi, echoing both Islamic and Confucian ideals, humanity is inherently endowed with the capacity to connect with the creative power at work behind the universe. Both Chinese philosophy and Islamic theology posit, with varying degrees of abstraction and anthropomorphism, that this union is in fact the original, perfect state of all existence. In Qur’ānic terms, this was the original unitive state of all creatures before the act of creation by Allah. In Neo-Confucian metaphysics, this is the state of the *taiji*, or Supreme Ultimate, before the bifurcation of the dual cosmic principles, *yin* and *yang*, and the subsequent emergence of the myriad creatures (*wanwu*). At this level of existence, all beings, macrocosmic and microcosmic, exist in perfect unity. Once they have been dispersed through the cosmic process of birth and transformation, the function of living beings is to reconnect with the transcendent power behind all things.

Human beings must practice self-cultivation in order to activate their inherent virtues that will bring them back into union with the transcendent, benevolent power of Heaven. According to Neo-Confucian thought, this human ideal is fully achieved by the sage, “who had reached the ultimate potential of true humanity by complete identification with all Creation, his every thought and action flowing in effortless harmony with the Cosmic Tao.”⁹¹ For Liu Zhi, drawing upon both Islamic and Chinese concepts, this path of self-cultivation and reunion is one based on ritual, specifically adherence to the ritual law of Islam, which is spelled out by the sage Muḥammad and is the central theme of the *Tianfang dianli*. This idea of ritual is mentioned here because Liu Zhi instructed his readers of its central importance in life: “If one were to carry and uphold [the principles of ritual] over one’s whole lifetime, there would be no daylight between the Principle of Heaven and oneself.”⁹² Liu Zhi’s understanding of the meaning and role of ritual is examined more fully in chapter 4.

This paradox of the union and separation of ultimate reality, posited as spiritual, immutable, and eternal, and the conditioned, phenomenal, and temporal reality of our everyday experience is common to many religio-philosophical traditions around the world. Many have maintained a view of ultimate reality, whether conceived of abstractly or as a personal being, as existing beyond our conventional perceptions and yet ultimately the source and goal of all existence. Inherent in such a conception is the logical question: How can a perfect, eternal, and uncreated absolute reality engender and interact with a flawed, temporal cosmos? This question has occupied religious thinkers and philosophers over the ages and has given rise to a range of doctrines and intellectual propositions. Liu Zhi took up this question as he both asserted the primordial unity of the absolute and relative reality and outlined the necessary steps, first conceptual and then practical, for their reunion.

Among the difficulties he encountered along the way, however, is the apparent incongruity of the generally abstract, impersonal Chinese conceptions of ultimate reality and the extremely personal theistic depiction of Allah in the scriptures and devotional literature of Islam. In terms of constructing a coherent metaphysical hierarchy, Liu Zhi, like his Han Kitāb predecessors and other writers of monotheistic apologia in Chinese, faced the problem of how to incorporate the God of creation into a cosmology that traditionally lacks any discernible creator, but rather evolves naturally without the impetus of a willful, intelligent being. The problem of translation, central to the work of the Han Kitāb enterprise as a whole, crops up in this context most poignantly, highlighting a mighty obstacle faced by the Chinese Muslim literati: how to render the God of Islam intelligible in Chinese.

Liu Zhi’s struggle with this fundamental problem required considerable conceptual flexibility and lexical finesse, and even so the incongruity remained.

In a non-Chinese context, it is difficult to imagine a Muslim scholar referring to the deity by a description like “the transcendent Principle of Heaven.” The Qur’ānic tradition ascribes ninety-nine names to Allah, all of them exceedingly active and/or personal. The devotional poetry of the Sufi tradition goes further in its personalization and addresses God in the most intimate of terms, such as “friend” and “beloved.” Poetry is all too often lost in translation: Despite the beauty and emotional appeal of Islam’s metaphorical schemes and images for conveying the nature of divinity, Liu Zhi was at times required to reduce them to comparatively dry expressions of abstraction in order to conform to Confucian standards of decorum.⁹³ At other times, occasionally manifesting the dichotomy of Chinese Islamic intellectual simultaneity, Liu Zhi also injected anthropomorphic depictions of God into his writings, but he was careful not to exceed the boundaries imposed by Confucian orthodoxy. Liu Zhi’s trouble harmonizing the monotheistic theology of Islam with the abstract metaphysics of the Chinese tradition rears its head throughout his philosophical discussion. His navigation and negotiation of the specific obstacle of divine nomenclature is discussed in the final chapter of this book.

Returning to the present discussion of how to link conceptually the absolute and relative reality, solutions proposed by various religio-philosophical traditions may be culturally circumscribed or dogmatically conceived, yet there is a common feature that most seem to share. Logic demands something to bridge this metaphysical gap, an intermediary by whose agency the transcendent and the immanent are linked. The orthodox Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, for example, embrace the idea that God created the cosmos *ex nihilo*. This fundamental tenet of monotheism differs significantly from the predominant Chinese cosmological view, inherited and developed by Neo-Confucian philosophers, of a self-existent but uncreated cosmos that evolves through successive phases from a state beyond conception to a monad, eventually producing the multiplicity and diversity of phenomenal reality. The Neo-Confucian cosmology shares commonalities with the Neo-Platonic unfolding of being from the one, the unmoved mover beyond all attributes. Various examples of the idea of a gradual evolutionary process—through which the transcendent reality generates from within itself incremental, increasingly material manifestations, until the emergence of phenomenal reality—abound in both Eastern and Western religio-philosophical traditions. Examples of the evolutionary model include the Neo-Platonic hypostatic chain of being in which the one gives rise to the nous, which in turn gives rise to an array of other realities, beginning with the psyche and the logos.⁹⁴ In Chinese thought, the *Daodejing* is the *locus classicus* for the corresponding cosmogonic formulation: “The Way gave birth to the one, the one gave birth to two, two gave birth to three, and from three were born all the myriad creatures.”⁹⁵

The Neo-Confucians, epitomized by Zhou Dunyi (1017–1073) in his *Taijitu* (Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate), generated a similar progression: *wuji* (the “ultimate of non-being,” or “beyond ultimate”) to *taiji* (the great ultimate) to *yin-yang* to *wanwu* (the myriad creatures). That sequence (or similar ones with subtle terminological variations) was envisioned by the Neo-Confucians as taking place in real time but not through conscious action or the willful design of a creator. The Han Kitāb writers, as heirs to two cosmological traditions, one non-theistic and the other monotheistic, sought to reconcile the obvious incongruity by simply adding Allah as a necessary prime mover, before the beyond ultimate. However, while such a simple narrative stroke may appear to solve a metaphysical quandary, it actually only glosses over a more profound philosophical problem concerning the incongruity of Chinese and Islamic notions of divinity, and moreover the universal paradox of divine transcendence and immanence.

In theistic traditions, the logical, or logistical, problem of how an imperfect creation, with human beings at its pinnacle, could possibly have originated from a transcendent, perfect creator has long plagued theologians. Another philosophical problem of theistic religions is what sort of continued relationship exists between the creator and the creation *ex post facto*. In so many of the world’s religions, ultimate reality is not only the remote source of original creativity, but also continues to sustain the universe and is the goal to which eternal spirits return once their ephemeral material existence comes to an end. In theistic formulations, it is common to find the notion that the creator maintains a concern for its creation. In the monotheistic religions in particular, the belief in a communicative relationship between God and humankind is central and paramount. For this two-way communication to occur requires some form of mediation.

SHENG: CHINESE SAGE, ISLAMIC PROPHET

In many religious traditions, the mode of communication is often posited as direct: divinity communicates its will verbally to an individual it selects out of the human community. Often, this individual is also portrayed as having the ability to reply to the divine reality and participate in a dialogue between the transcendent and temporal realms. Thus this special human being serves as a conduit of divine revelation, a medium who personally bridges the metaphysical gap. In traditions that espouse such a belief, the logical challenges of such a scenario are often overlooked. The relationship between such a special individual and divinity is supernatural, the conventional exoteric understanding of it being simply that it is a divine prerogative to suspend natural laws at will; hence the miracle of revelation.

Belief in some sort of divine revelation abounds in the world’s religions, though its actual mechanism has taken diverse forms, both among and within

various cultures. In ancient China, for example, the *Shijing* relates how the supreme deity, Shangdi,⁹⁶ communicated directly with ancient rulers: “The Lord said to King Wen, ‘I am moved by your bright virtue. Your high renown has not made you put on proud airs.’”⁹⁷ However, in later Chinese history, this belief in a highly anthropomorphic deity gave way to the more abstract concept of *tian*, or Heaven. Heaven was still regarded as willful and concerned with human affairs, but its interactions with the world were not effected through verbal communication with individuals. Instead it communicated its will through natural forces. The transition between the earlier formulations of direct revelation and the later more subtle, abstract form of communication is expressed in the *Lunyu* in Confucius’ rhetorical question: “Does *tian* speak? And yet the four seasons turn and the myriad things are born and grow within. Does *tian* say anything?”⁹⁸

By contrast, the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions have dogmatically maintained the notion of direct divine revelation through a human medium. However, the mechanism by which divine revelation occurs is not always uniform within or among the Abrahamic traditions either. For example, according to both the Bible and the Qur’ān, God sometimes communicates directly to a human being, or sometimes He sends an angel, a spiritual being in material form, to convey His message to people. In yet other cases, He manifests Himself through some sort of supernatural medium, such as a miraculous burning bush or luminous cloud. One thing is consistent, however: He does not, as a rule, communicate directly with humanity at large. Direct communication is reserved for special conduits of revelation—the prophets. Ordinary humans receive the divine message from the prophet sent to them. Otherwise, they are left to ponder the signs revealed by God in natural phenomena. Thus certain passages in the Qur’ān referring to divine communication through the signs of nature are reminiscent of Confucius’ remarks.⁹⁹ Liu Zhi was obviously influenced by such ideas coming from both sides of his dual intellectual heritage when he employed natural metaphors in his chapters on theology and recognition of the monotheistic God in the *Tianfang dianli*.¹⁰⁰

The most pivotal figure in the revelatory process outlined by the Abrahamic traditions is the prophet, a human being specially selected and qualified to receive, interpret, and disseminate divine communication. It stands to reason that the link between the divine and human realms should be effected by human beings specially endowed with supernatural powers to communicate with God. After all, what better medium could be conceived for humans to relate to the supreme being than one of their own kind, albeit an exceptional member of the species? Yet the logical challenge of this paradoxical interaction has nevertheless required the agency of quasi-spiritual, quasi-human agents, such as the angels of the biblical and Qur’ānic traditions.

Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb scholars, like Chinese Jewish and Christian apologists before them, found a strong resonance between the Islamic notion of the prophet and the ancient Chinese figure of the sage (*shengren*, or simply *sheng*). The role of the Chinese sage was to act as an agent of Heaven, expressing its will, or mandate, and implementing the universal Way by means of a Teaching promulgated in human society. Since Heaven does not speak its will in direct verbal communication to humankind, the role of the sage is to embody the Way, as Mencius said: “Heaven does not speak. Rather, it manifests its will through [the sage’s] practices and his conduct of affairs, and that is all.”¹⁰¹ The sage is a human being through whose example others may learn to follow the Way of Heaven, and it is precisely because he is human that he is able to serve as an example to the rest of humanity. Mencius confirmed this understanding when he said that “all things of the same kind generally resemble one another. How could there be any doubt that the same is true with respect to human beings? The sage and I are the same in kind.”¹⁰²

In the Islamic tradition, the same idea is held about the prophets, about whom Allah says in the Qur’ān: “We did not send any messengers before you (Muḥammad) who did not eat food and visit the marketplaces. We use some of you as a test for the others.”¹⁰³ Likewise, Muḥammad was commanded to say, “Glory to my Lord, am I anything but a mortal messenger?”¹⁰⁴ and, “I am only a human being like all of you, but it has been revealed to me that your god is a God unique and singular.”¹⁰⁵ Thus, according to the scriptural tradition, the difference between a prophet and other human beings is not one of kind, but rather of degree, a difference that earns the prophets special status in their roles as mediators between God and creation. Liu Zhi examined this idea and discussed it in detail in the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, where he wrote, “All people are of one and the same humankind, but among them there are nine ranks.”¹⁰⁶

Within this hierarchical scheme, the prophets exceed all other human beings. Moreover, as a divinely endowed individual, each of the prophets possessed his own special qualifications, some surpassing others in rank. Just as all people are equally considered human but are assigned a higher or lower status based on their conduct and character, the prophets also constitute a single class subdivided by rank. Thus the Qur’ān instructs Muslims to say, “We make no distinction among any of God’s Messengers”¹⁰⁷ even as the tradition recognizes that some prophets were greater than others and that Muḥammad occupied the highest level by himself. Mencius similarly distinguished between different categories of sages when he said: “The practices of the sages are not all the same: Some remained far from worldly power, while others served close to it; some went out into society, while others remained reclusive. Yet all found refuge in their individual purity.”¹⁰⁸ Drawing from both sides of his intellectual and cultural background, Liu Zhi

could therefore assert that “although they were all sages, their grades were different,” and then arrange them into four hierarchical classes: sages (*sheng*); esteemed sages (*qinsheng*); great sages (*dasheng*); and the ultimate sage (*zhisheng*).¹⁰⁹

According to the scriptural tradition, it was the quality of his character that set Muḥammad apart from other people, and on this basis God chose him as the conduit of His will and as a model of conduct for others to follow. Allah addresses the Prophet in the Qur’ān, saying, “Verily you possess a sublime moral character,”¹¹⁰ and he tells the believers that “in the Messenger of God exists a fine model for you.”¹¹¹ These are essentially the same qualification and role attributed to the sage in Chinese tradition, whether in Confucian discourse or in Daoist, as the *Daodejing* says: “Thus, the sage embraces the one, and becomes a standard for the entire world.”¹¹² The sage or prophet, in the Chinese and Islamic traditions respectively, represents an ideal figure, a human being endowed with special qualifications that make him a suitable mediator between the divine and mundane realms.

The Neo-Confucian scholar Shao Kangjie (1011–1077) described the sage as the “ultimate of man” (*renji*), “the perfect man, one who can fully develop the nature of man and investigate the principle of man to the utmost.”¹¹³ This characterization of the sage in the Chinese tradition mirrors the Islamic understanding of the Prophet as *al-Insān al-Kāmil*, the “perfect man,” a concept emphasized especially in Sufism as the paradigmatic human figure and the medium through whom God is reflected and made known to the world.¹¹⁴

PRECEDENTS TO THE CHINESE MUSLIM USE OF THE TERM *SHENG*

Given the similarity between the Chinese and Islamic conceptions of the ideal human figure, it is hardly surprising that Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb writers seized upon the concept of the *shengren*, or sage, equated it with the figure of the prophet, and gave it a place of central importance in their discourse. Nor were Chinese Muslim scholars the first to do so; Buddhists, Nestorians, Jews, and Jesuits had all co-opted the term *sheng* before them. Moreover, apologists for each of the Abrahamic faiths in China made use of the idea of universal sagehood based on a doctrine of Mencius and elaborated on by the Song Neo-Confucian scholar Lu Xiangshan, who wrote, “In the Eastern, Southern, Western and Northern Seas, Sages appear. They all share this mind; they all share this principle.” The Abrahamic apologists used this seminal Chinese idea to promote the argument that their prophets were none other than those sages from the West, who embodied and preached the same universal principle as the ancient Chinese sages.

This notion of the ubiquity of sages, all deriving their moral and spiritual power from a common source—Heaven—was particularly helpful to the Chinese

Muslim scholars in their attempts to present the origins of Islam as legitimate and authentic. They portrayed their religion as the orthodox Teaching of the “Western sage,” Muḥammad, and in so doing linked him, and the other Qur’ānic prophets, to the lineage of the ancient sages of the East, including Confucius and Mencius. Thus, in the *Tianfang dianli* Liu Zhi wrote:

The sage of the West, Muḥammad, was born after Confucius and lived in Arabia. He was so far removed in time and space from the Chinese sages that we do not even know exactly by how much. The languages they spoke are mutually unintelligible. How is it, then, that their ways are in full accord? The answer is that they were of one mind. Thus, their Way is the same.¹¹⁵

It is important to note that despite tendencies in both the Confucian and Islamic traditions to elevate their revered figures to almost superhuman status, the mainstream view concerning the sages and prophets respectively was that they were mortal human beings. This similarity is what allowed the Han Kitāb (and to some extent Chinese Jewish) scholars to use the term *sheng* so effectively in their writings, where apologists for other religious traditions ran into certain conceptual difficulties. China has no shortage of native gods, some of them derived from ancient animistic and shamanistic traditions and others drawn from among ancestors and mythical or quasi-historical personages who were deified by popular belief. Yet while within popular religion human beings were sometimes elevated to a divine status and made objects of worship, among the Confucian literati elite such practices were considered superstitious. This view may be traced back to Confucius himself, who advocated performance of ancient rituals, including sacrifices to ancestral spirits, but who cautioned against reifying spirits as objects of worship. Filial veneration of one’s own direct ancestors was essential to maintaining a social hierarchy based on respect and duty, but Confucius also frowned upon extending this practice beyond one’s own family: “Sacrificing to ancestral spirits other than one’s own is being unctuous.”¹¹⁶ Thus the tradition eschews the popular practice of deifying human beings, even those whose legendary virtue would make them most worthy of veneration. As such, the sages, including the legendary ancient rulers of China as well as Confucius and his eminent followers, were not to be understood as anything more than human. The *shengren* were exemplary human beings, culture heroes of legendary virtue, but they were not gods. Confucius was revered by the Chinese elite as a sort of “patron saint” of literati culture, but he and other “former worthies” (*xianxian*) “were ‘former’ because they were men, not gods, who lived in historical times.”¹¹⁷ Thus, even though temples dedicated to Confucius and other Confucian sages and worthies had been built as centers of ritual associated with

the state cult of imperial China, “the educated elite resisted all efforts to deify their Master and . . . in a land where it was commonplace to turn men into gods, Master K’ung remained a human figure.”¹¹⁸ This is why the term *sheng* and the Chinese concept of the sage concept was so readily adopted by the Han Kitāb writers, whose tradition similarly emphasized the humanity of its holy men.

Before the Muslim scholars, however, apologists for other foreign religions in China had similarly tried to elevate their venerated figures to be on a par with Confucius, also using the term *sheng* in the process. Chinese Buddhists had used the term *sheng* to describe the Buddha, his disciples, and later saints of the tradition, but more often than not they used it in its adjectival sense, which may be translated in English as “holy.” They did not try to equate the Buddha or other persons with the ancient Chinese sages, nor did they ever try to claim Confucius as a Buddha. The attempt to harmonize the Chinese concept of the sage with the Buddha or other Buddhist figurations of holiness was hindered by certain fundamental differences between the ways the two traditions view and honor their founders and later luminaries. The historical Buddha, Siddhārtha Gautama Shākyamuni, was a human being, and early Buddhist literature affirms that he eschewed attempts by his followers to elevate him beyond human status or to worship him. But the same canon also attributes to him superhuman qualities and deeds, including exercising power over the gods of the Hindu pantheon. The Buddha, in his enlightened state, was revered as an embodiment of transcendence, a “god above the gods.”¹¹⁹ The Buddha as mortal human teacher is but one understanding of buddhahood found within the Mahāyāna tradition that proliferated in China. Doctrinally, apart from the humanity of the historical Buddha, the Mahāyāna teachings also comprehend the concept of Buddha on three levels:

On the highest level, the Godhead (or Ultimate Reality, or Void) was of course One and ineffable. But on the relative level, the Principle of Buddha might be conceived as infinitely multiple. At the level where expedience (*upāya*) sought to meet the limitations of popular understanding, the buddhas and bodhisattvas became individualized deities, comprehensible and approachable by the ignorant masses.¹²⁰

In this context, upon arrival in China, the “Buddha was another god, more approachable than native gods.”¹²¹

The term *sheng* does not appear in the earliest of the Chinese inscriptions (1489) produced by the Kaifeng Jewish community. However, it does appear in the text of 1663 stone stele, where the author, Liu Chang, uses it in two formulations. The first is an epithet for Moses, *shengzu Moshe*, which may be translated as the “sage-ancestor Moses” (after the first appearance, *Moshe* is dropped).¹²² It also

appears in the phrase *shengjing*, which may be translated as “the sage’s scriptures.”¹²³ “Liu Chang clearly emphasizes the inextricable connection of Moses to the Jewish scriptures, not only implicitly by this lexical link, but explicitly as he describes Moses’ role in the tradition. He describes Moses as having “received the scriptures on Mt. Sinai,” a clear allusion to the orthodox Jewish notion that the Torah was divinely revealed, though the author is careful not to say from whom Moses received the scripture.”¹²⁴ Contradicting this notion of revelation, however, is a phrase in the subsequent passage that indicates Moses’ authorship of the scripture, stating that he “composed . . . the texts of the Scripture.”¹²⁵ In a later passage, Liu Chang describes Moses’ function as “assembling the Scripture.”¹²⁶ It would appear that Liu Chang, in this earliest known Jewish usage of the term *sheng*, was suggesting a link between Judaism’s understanding of Moses as a prophet and the role of the sages in the ancient Chinese tradition. What is clear is that both Moses and the Chinese sages are associated with *jing* (scriptures/classics), yet the author struggles to reconcile the Semitic concept of the prophet as the recipient of supernatural revelation with the more secular Confucian understanding the sage as an author, or in the case of Confucius a compiler and transmitter, of orthodox teachings. It would appear that Liu Chang was wrestling with the need to convey a central tenet of Judaism in a Confucian context devoid of a corresponding notion of revelation.

While it is true that the ancient classics stated that Heaven communicated directly with the ancient sage-rulers of China and that the sages are the source of the classics, that is as far as the Confucian tradition goes; there is no suggestion that the Chinese classics are of divine authorship, just as there is no suggestion that the sages were anything more than human. The 1663 Jewish inscription, by applying the term *sheng* to Moses, clearly implies his central role in the tradition, analogous to the position of Confucius in the Confucian tradition. Like Confucius, Moses is depicted as an ideal teacher and disseminator of orthodox knowledge, of authoritative truth. We do not find any suggestion of the Sage’s superhuman status in either tradition. The Chinese Jewish writer Liu Chang adopted this term, thereby conflating the central figures of the two traditions and in the process modifying the depiction of Moses just enough to render him intelligible in a Confucian context. He had to downplay the idea of revelation so as not to inject a supernatural element into the portrayal of the sage-ancestor that could have made him less acceptable to Confucian sensibilities. Yet we see some trepidation on the part of this Jewish writer, as he links the Israelite prophet to the Confucian ideal of the sage but does not take the further step that Liu Zhi and other Muslim writers do of saying that the Abrahamic prophets and the Chinese sages all belong to a single category. It took the Jewish community more than a century and a half to arrive at this lexical usage, which was echoed by the Han Kitāb writers’ use of *sheng*

to express the Islamic concept of prophethood, a status shared by Muḥammad, Moses, and other biblical figures, nearly a half century later.

The earliest Christians in China, the Nestorians, had made liberal use of the term *sheng* in their Chinese writings. Often, like their Buddhist counterparts, they used it in its adjectival sense, to mean “holy.” They also used it to refer to biblical prophets, Christian saints, important figures in the history of the Church, and, of course, to Jesus himself.¹²⁷ Catholics translating to and from Chinese, especially the Jesuits, encountered the same conceptual impediment centuries after their Nestorian precursors when they used the term *sheng* in their writings. Like the Nestorians before them, they had to find vocabulary to convey the unique role of Jesus, historically and metaphysically. In this endeavor, the early Jesuit writers in Chinese, led by Ricci, sought to avoid the pitfalls of the Nestorian usage, which attempted to force the divine Christ into the intrinsically human category of the sage. The Jesuits did not typically use the term *sheng* to refer to Jesus. Instead, they either called him *Yesu*, a transliteration of his name, or referred to him as *tianzhu* (“Lord of Heaven”), thereby acknowledging his place in the Trinity.

With different motivations from those of their European Jesuit patrons, later Chinese Christian intellectuals, literati converts such as Yang Tingyun, were intent on accommodating their new faith to the “body and history of orthodox Chinese thought.”¹²⁸ It was therefore more important to them to retain in their writings the more Chinese sense of the term *sheng*, with its cultural, philosophical, and even political connotations. Yang Tingyun therefore used the term to draw the same sort of correlation between “sages of the East and West,” based on Liu Xiangshan’s famous statement, cited in many Han Kitāb texts. However, because of the problem of the imprecise correspondence of the term *sheng* to the any single Christian concept, Chinese Christian apologists were cautious in extending the reach of their accommodative claims, and they circumscribed their use of terminology accordingly. For example, Yang Tingyun did not venture to make the link between the biblical prophets, saints, or Jesus explicit. Rather, he only went so far as to say that “the Way of the foreigners is indeed the same as the Way of the Ancient Chinese . . . Sages,”¹²⁹ while leaving it to his readers to infer the role of Jesus in the universal lineage of sages.

By contrast, Chinese Muslim writers like Liu Zhi were more bold in their usage, going “one step further” than their Christian counterparts “by portraying their great teachers, Muhammad foremost among them, as being sages themselves.”¹³⁰ That is, whereas the Chinese Christians only implied the sagehood of their religious figures, the Han Kitāb scholars were explicit in counting Muḥammad and the other prophets as sages alongside Confucius and the ancients. This fact was both a cause and an effect of the underlying Confucian-Islamic simultaneity of the Chinese Muslim literati.

We have already seen how the application of the term *sheng* differed in Buddhist, Jewish, Nestorian, Catholic, and Muslim contexts. Neither Buddhist nor Christian writers in Chinese took the step we have seen in Han Kitāb texts of equating their revered historical religious figures with the Chinese sages. Not only historical and social factors, but also distinct religious doctrines contributed to this disparity. Both Buddha and Christ, as well as their disciples and followers, bore many characteristics that were analogous to those attributed to the ancient Chinese sages. Dogma asserting their divinity, however, overshadowed the humanity that was the hallmark of the exemplars of the Confucian tradition. Consequently, Chinese Buddhists and Christians could suggest and infer that Jesus and Śākyamuni were similar to the ancients of China, but neither Buddhist nor Christian writers went so far as to say the founders of their faiths *were* sages (indeed, their doctrines asserted that their holy figures were superhuman and therefore superior to the sages). Chinese Jewish and Muslim scholars, on the other hand, did just that, and none was bolder in his use of the term *sheng*, and his equation of the sages of the East and the West, than Liu Zhi. Surely the Islamic doctrine of prophethood, in so many ways parallel to the traditional Chinese notion of the sage, played an important role in allowing the construction of this ideational bridge between cultures, which other foreign religious accommodationists could not achieve as thoroughly.

SHENG AND FA: THE RELATIONSHIP OF THE SAGE MUḤAMMAD TO THE LAW OF ISLAM

As the Han Kitāb writers seized upon similarities between the traditional Chinese notion of the sage and the Islamic figure of the prophet, in Chinese metaphysical terms Muḥammad became a *shengren*, a link in the long chain of sages sent by Heaven to communicate the Way through their worldly teaching. Qur'ānic prophets were reinterpreted as "sages from the West," portrayed as exponents of the same universal Principle as the ancient Chinese sages, yet each had his own teaching suited to the exigencies of his time and place. Muḥammad was presented as the "ultimate sage" (*zhisheng*), a term expressing both his chronological place at the end of the chain as well as his pre-eminent spiritual status.¹³¹

With the appropriation of the term *sheng*, Chinese Muslim scholars endorsed the traditional view of the sage not only as an agent implementing the Way of Heaven, but also as a cultivator of learning, of a practical teaching. In fact, the spiritual function of Muḥammad as the conveyor of God's revealed word was often downplayed by Chinese Muslim scholars, whereas his roles as a just leader and moral exemplar were emphasized.¹³² The idea of revealed scripture is absent from Confucianism, so to stress it would have made Islam seem bizarre to

Confucian readers. Instead, the Han Kitāb writers stressed the classical Chinese conception of the sage's most important function: to set a standard of moral behavior, in accordance with the Way, that would lead other human beings to uprightness by example.

While it was understood that the principles on which the sage based his Teaching came to him from Heaven, the Confucian tradition showed relatively little concern for the specific mechanisms by which Heaven communicated its will to him. This stands in stark contrast to the Islamic idea of revelation, which assumes the Prophet's utter dependence on God for verbatim instructions. Certainly the lack of an overtly personal deity in the Confucian tradition, compared with the centrality of Allah in Islam, helps to account for this significant difference between the portrayal of Muḥammad as sage, in Chinese terms, and the classical Islamic ideal of prophethood. The de-emphasis on the revelatory aspect of Muḥammad's mission meant that the Han Kitāb portrayal of Muḥammad was in important ways more strongly evocative of the Confucian ideal of the sage than the traditional Islamic understanding of the term "prophet." The reason for this shift in emphasis was not that the Chinese Muslim scholars were unaware of, or consciously rejected, the Islamic belief in revelation. To the contrary, in his discussion of Muḥammad and other sages in the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi used a number of terms and phrases that clearly suggest the concept of revelation.¹³³ A more likely explanation is that the Chinese Muslim literati, immersed as they were in Confucian culture, had completely assimilated the Chinese view of the sage, which emphasized his moral and social functions. In their Chinese-Islamic simultaneity, they saw no contradiction between this view and the prevailing Islamic tenet, but their emphasis was influenced by the dominant values of the Chinese intellectual environment in which they lived and worked.

In addition to this unconscious assimilation, it is also possible that they wrote with their Confucianized Muslim and non-Muslim Confucian audiences in mind and wished to package their ideas in a form that would be more easily digestible to them. In other words, "the portrayal of Muhammad as sage or righteous ruler . . . made Muhammad a part of Chinese tradition and rendered him a culturally intelligible figure to the interpretive categories of Han [Chinese] society."¹³⁴ Thus, the depiction of the Prophet as sage may be seen both as an expression of fundamental Chinese Muslim simultaneity and a manifestation of the Han Kitāb writers' desire to carve out a niche for themselves and their tradition in the milieu of Confucian literati culture.

The manner in which Chinese Muslim, Jewish, and Christian scholars harmonized some but not all Chinese and foreign religio-philosophical concepts illustrates how, to the extent they could, they came to a simultaneous understanding of their dual traditions but could not always, and did not have to, make its two

parts entirely congruent. They could leave some understandings, those that would be impossible or (worse yet) heterodox in Chinese, out of their texts (as the Jesuits had done, for example, with the Crucifixion),¹³⁵ or they could include brief references in Chinese to foreign doctrines, without finding it necessary to explicate their meaning. While Liu Zhi demonstrated an inclination toward the congruity of the two traditions, we can speculate that he was nevertheless willing to leave certain things out, or vaguely present others, to preserve Muslim legitimacy in a culture that would have found certain Islamic claims bizarre or unacceptable. In other words, while Liu Zhi's simultaneity was, in most instances, apparently seamless, we must admit the possibility that he (like many minority intellectuals all over the world and throughout the ages) left space in his own mind for an "insider" understanding of Islam, which he could not render entirely intelligible to his fellow Confucians.

Whatever their motivation for doing so, by depicting Muḥammad as a sage the Han Kitāb scholars placed particular emphasis on his moral and ethical qualities and on his social roles as teacher and leader. The classical Chinese tradition upholds the ancient Chinese sages as exemplars of moral conduct and social ethics. Applying this same standard to the Prophet Muḥammad, the Chinese Muslim scholar Zhang Zhong wrote that "what the sage did, we do; what the sage forbade, we forbid," and he went on to equate this ethic with the Chinese tradition of following the conduct of the ancient sage-kings, Yao and Shun.¹³⁶ As Ben-Dor points out, "the reasoning behind such Chinese Muslim interpretations is that Muhammad is to be imitated because he is a sage, and sages, in Chinese tradition are figures worthy of emulation."¹³⁷

Even with the emphasis of Muḥammad's sage-like qualities over his prophetic endowments, the depiction of the Prophet in the Han Kitāb is nevertheless completely consistent with mainstream Islamic views. The Qur'ān also praises the Prophet's "sublime moral character,"¹³⁸ and exhorts believers to emulate the "fine model" he represents.¹³⁹ Since Muḥammad's spiritual gifts and special relationship to God are unique to him, and Muslims therefore cannot emulate him in this respect, this verse should be read as an injunction to follow his practical example and try to imitate his character. This understanding is the basis of the Sunna, the deeds and words of the Prophet that collectively represent his practical tradition, which Muslims are to follow. One of Muḥammad's wives, 'Ā'isha, described her late husband as the "walking, talking Qur'ān." Insofar as they aspire to follow his example, Muslims are likewise instructed to walk in the path laid out by God in the Qur'ān and manifested in the practices of the Prophet; in Chinese philosophical terms, these corresponded to the *dao* (Way) of Heaven, and the *jiao* (Teaching) of the sage respectively.

If the sage is the living link between Heaven and Man, setting a practical

example through his Teaching to lead people to the Way, where then does the concept of the law, introduced by Liu Zhi and expressed by the term *fa*, fit in this scheme? One of the classical meanings of the term *fa* is a “pattern” or “moral standard.” Furthermore, in Confucian texts *fa* was used explicitly to describe the sage or ideal ruler, whose conduct serves as the pattern for human activity and a precedent for future generations.¹⁴⁰

In the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi used the term to express his idea of “the law.” In Liu Zhi’s formulation, *fa* encompassed the *sharī‘a*, along with the other “vehicles,” or stages, of the Sufi path. In fact, it was presented as a transcendent “supreme vehicle” “by which Heaven and Man may be transformed and merged.”¹⁴¹ Liu Zhi described the law as the criterion for discerning the Principle of Heaven, as a device that helps people gradually to adopt the Way, and as the mechanism without which the Teaching could not be established. Thus the law connects upwards to the transcendent Principle of Heaven and the Way, and downwards to the Teaching that operates on the temporal level. Where then does the figure of the sage fit in this system, especially given its level of philosophical abstraction, which differs so greatly from the personal relationship of Allah to the Prophet in the Islamic tradition?

In the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli* Liu Zhi suggests a sort of metaphysical hierarchy linking Heaven and humankind in which the law and the sage seem to overlap each other in a number of functions. Both the law and the sage serve as models of ethical behavior and moral character. The sage, however, is seen specifically as the axis connecting the divine realm of Heaven to the human world. As a human being endowed with extraordinary spiritual acumen, the sage is the perfect living conduit for the will of Heaven to be disseminated among humankind. Thus, Liu Zhi described the Prophet Muḥammad as sharing a special unity with Heaven, expressed through the classical Chinese concept of the Way: “The Way of the sage is none other than the Way of Heaven. The sage’s Teaching is none other than the dissemination and promulgation of the Way of Heaven.”¹⁴²

So the sage, like the law, is an agent for joining Heaven and Man. Both serve to open a channel for the communication of the divine will to human beings, and both are instrumental in establishing a code of practice to reflect that will. This apparent redundancy should not suggest, however, that one may replace the other. To the contrary, in Liu Zhi’s metaphysical and religious system, the two are parallel, complimentary, and mutually dependent. Liu Zhi quoted from a source called the *Jilu huibian*,¹⁴³ which says that the sage “expounded and propagated the law of the Teaching.”¹⁴⁴ However, as lawgiver and role model, the sage is above all the personal agent of God’s will, best suited to communicate it to other human beings precisely because he is human. The law is the nonhuman mechanism whereby this

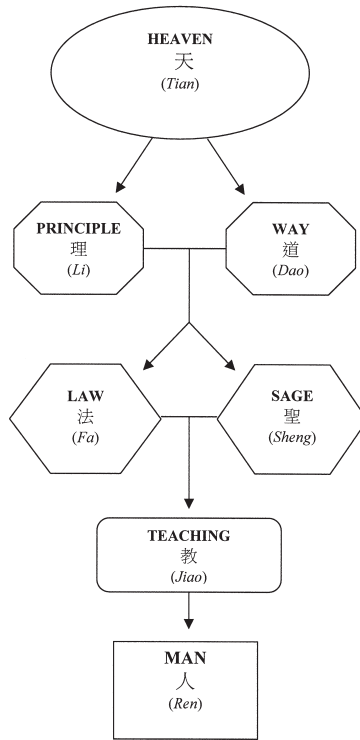


FIGURE 3. Conceptual Link between Heaven and Man in the *Tianfang dianli*

communication is achieved. As the living expression of the moral standard of the Way, it may even be said that the sage is the embodiment of the law.

The sage and the law are thus interconnected, occupying parallel places on the same interstitial plane between the transcendent Way of Heaven, and the Teaching, which exists in the world of human beings. The Teaching depends on the law to give it its content, derived from the Way, and it relies on the sage to implement it and establish it in society. Both are necessary for the conceptual, and actual, linking of the eternal Way to the worldly Teaching. All the key classical Chinese religio-philosophical concepts and terms used by Liu Zhi—*dao*, *li*, *jiao*, *fa*, and *sheng*—interact in an elaborate, sophisticated, and systematic manner to convey the metaphysical connection between Heaven and Man in Chinese terms (or God and creation in Islamic terms). Figure 3 attempts to map the interrelation of these seminal concepts gleaned from the text of the *Tianfang dianli*.

CHAPTER 4

RITUAL AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHINESE-ISLAMIC SIMULTANEITY

Liu Zhi viewed his three most famous works, the “*Tianfang* trilogy,” as operating together to present a comprehensive, systematic, and holistic view of Islam. So while each of the books can stand on its own, the discourse that runs through them must be viewed as progressive, enabling one to cross-reference the earlier texts in the later ones. The overlapping content of the three books notwithstanding, each has its own distinct focus. Thus, Liu Zhi described the *Tianfang dianli* as “a book that explains the Teaching (*jiao*),”¹ intended to deal with the concrete, practical aspects of Islam as the only Han Kitāb book devoted primarily to Islamic ritual law.

The question of the relative merits of Liu Zhi’s three most famous works, and what recommends one of them over the others as a subject of study, is not a value judgment about which work is the “best” of the three. It is possible to focus on an individual work while recognizing its place within the “*Tianfang* trilogy,” as well as within the overall body of Liu Zhi’s writings, the entire Han Kitāb corpus, and even the greater Chinese and Islamic intellectual traditions. Such an examination of the *Tianfang dianli* reveals it to be a most unusual and original work within the Chinese Islamic canon and, paradoxically, in other ways the epitomic representation of the religio-cultural simultaneity that lay at the heart of all Chinese Muslim scholarly activity.

An important aspect of Liu Zhi’s legacy was the relative popularity of his work among Chinese Muslim laypeople. Thus modern scholars have been justified in referring to his last major work, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, as the most famous of Liu Zhi’s books because of its mass appeal.² Liu Zhi himself highly

estimated its value, which he saw as the crowning achievement of his writing career and the culmination of his grand exposition of Islam.³ Liu Zhi and his Chinese Muslim literati colleagues recognized the importance of this first biography of the Prophet in Chinese, yet the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* was not published and circulated until the 1780s, well after the author's death. At that time, Liu Zhi's posthumous editor and publisher, Yuan Guozuo, avidly promoted the book, even seeing that it was presented to the Qianlong emperor in 1782.⁴ Unlike the *Tianfang dianli*, however, it was not included in the *Siku quanshu* compendium. The published edition was embellished with prefaces written by several prominent eighteenth-century Muslim literati.⁵ However, unlike both the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli*, which contain laudatory prefaces from Confucian scholar-official contemporaries of Liu Zhi, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* bears no evidence of non-Muslim literati interest. We may infer that the subject matter, combined with the narrative style, made this the most accessible of Liu Zhi's writings to a Chinese Muslim audience. The book may have "fit the rhetorical and religious needs of Chinese Muslims,"⁶ but Muḥammad's life story held little appeal to readers outside of Liu Zhi's own faith community.

The religious role the book served and its accessible content and style made it arguably the "best known Muslim work in Chinese."⁷ In his *Encyclopaedia of Islam* entry on Liu Zhi, Forbes described the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* as "undoubtedly Liu Chih's greatest work,"⁸ but as Murata correctly points out, "this seems a premature judgment, since greatness is not necessarily gauged by widespread appeal."⁹ Nevertheless, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* is important in the study of the life and work of Liu Zhi, and as Sachiko Murata observes, "a study of Liu Chih's methods in this book would tell us a great deal about how Islam was being taught to Chinese Muslims."¹⁰ Research into such a popular book as the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* can therefore help shed light on the relationship between the Han Kitāb writers, epitomized by Liu Zhi, and their larger constituency.

By contrast, Liu Zhi's "two other major books (are) sophisticated attempts to harmonize Islamic metaphysical, cosmological, and spiritual teachings with the Chinese traditions (and) are certainly more interesting for Chinese intellectual history, and either or both may have made a more important contribution to the permanent establishment of Islam in China."¹¹ Although the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* may have received greater attention from non-Chinese researchers, in part because of its renown among Chinese Muslims, the two earlier "*Tianfang*" books are more representative of the syncretic methods and accommodative motives underpinning the Han Kitāb enterprise as a whole.

Their accommodative quality makes these books germane to the larger discussion of late Ming–early Qing intellectual history, particularly the widespread movement of religio-philosophical syncretism. Reflecting the spirit of the times,

Liu Zhi's integration of sophisticated Confucian concepts and terminology into the theories presented in the *Tianfang xingli* and *Tianfang dianli* made these books, out of the entire Han Kitāb corpus, especially accessible and attractive to Confucianized Muslim and non-Muslim readers alike. These works, and other Han Kitāb works like them, not only exhibit the simultaneity of their authors, but also of their audience. The laudatory prefaces written by relatively high-ranking non-Muslim officials for both of these books are testaments to the texts' broad appeal. The relative fame of Liu Zhi's last major work, therefore, should not overshadow these earlier texts, especially when the respect they garnered brought with it an imprimatur of the Confucian elite, which in turn helped secure a place of acceptability for the Muslim scholars and their tradition within Chinese literati culture and society.

The *Tianfang dianli*'s inclusion in the *Siku quanshu* catalogue was surely influenced by the favorable comments of the Confucian officials who wrote prefaces for it. A further clue to what distinguished and recommended the book to the *Siku quanshu* editors is to be found in the book's second preface. Written by Xu Zhuo, a *jinshi* degree holder and vice president of the Board of Rites, the preface begins rhetorically with the universal proclamation: "Ritual is that by which things are accomplished."¹² In the lines that follow, Xu Zhuo developed this theme:

Heaven perpetuates its purity by ritual. Earth perpetuates its tranquility by ritual. All beings perpetuate their propagation by ritual. Humans transform themselves into the pinnacle of creation by ritual. In this way, ritual controls Heaven and Earth and binds the myriad creatures. If there were no ritual, even for a single day, all would be lost.¹³

It is quite significant that a Confucian official serving on the Board of Rites should have begun his preface in this way, for it serves to ground the *Tianfang dianli* in the larger cultural context of imperial China in which the concept of ritual (*li*) was paramount.¹⁴ After first establishing the universal context of his discussion, Xu Zhuo remarked on the specific Islamic content of the *Tianfang dianli*, making the now familiar claim that "[w]herever people have lived, there have been sages," and that the themes of the book represent "what the sages of the West used to instruct the people of the West."¹⁵ Only then did he go on to sing the praises of the author in a manner resembling the other non-Muslim contributors of prefaces to Liu Zhi's books.

Xu Zhuo's preface stands out among the others because of its unique emphasis on ritual, just as the *Tianfang dianli* stands out among the Han Kitāb as the sole book devoted to the subject of Islamic ritual law. In these distinctions lay the key to understanding why the editors of the *Siku quanshu* singled out

the *Tianfang dianli* from among all other Chinese Islamic literature for inclusion in their project. Given the prominent role of the concept of ritual in Confucian thought and official life, a book identified with the subject, albeit from a Muslim author, would at least have attracted some attention. Liu Zhi's emphasis on ritual would have demanded the attention of the *Siku quanshu* editors, who would have to scrutinize it to make certain Liu Zhi had not profaned this "sacred" concept. Ritual was the backbone of state protocol and government procedure. It was, therefore, far too important a subject for the editors, in their dual role as censors, to allow a book about it to go unchecked. The *Siku quanshu* scholars would have found that while his main intent was to present Islamic rites and customs, Liu Zhi's usage of the term *li*, together with other classical Chinese terms he co-opted, was entirely consistent with Confucian standards of orthodoxy. Therefore they would not be disposed to dismiss the work out of hand, as they had been with other ostensibly non-Confucian literature, such as Buddhist or Christian books, or other Han Kitāb texts of a more "catechistic" bent.

LI: RITUAL IN CHINESE CIVILIZATION

The earliest usage of the term *li* in the Confucian canon refers to the sacrificial rites of the righteous legendary rulers of the Xia (ca. 2100–ca. 1600 BCE), Shang (ca. 1600–ca. 1100 BCE), and Zhou (ca. 1100–256 BCE) dynasties. When Confucius spoke of ritual, it was these ceremonial practices, outlined in texts like the *Liji*, that he had in mind. According to his disciples, "among the common discourse of the Master, the *Shijing*, the *Shujing*, and the implementation of ritual were all matters that he discussed frequently."¹⁶ For Confucius, the rites of the ancients represented more than specific religious ceremonies. In the etiquette that surrounded these rites, and in the comportment with which they were carried out, one could also find the basis of all right conduct. Ancient ritual forms thus served as the "pattern" for social organization and behavior, the fundamental set of rules upon which other codes of practice—personal, cultural, or political—were based.

Arising from this understanding, the term *li* has developed its wide array of nuances, from its more literal sense as "ritual," "rite," or "ceremony" to its broader meaning of "etiquette," to its abstract implication as "propriety" or "decorum." Thus the word "embraces all rites, custom, manners, conventions from the sacrifices to ancestors down to the detail of social etiquette."¹⁷ Yet, while the meaning of *li* came to exceed the limits of religious practice, "for Confucius it has everywhere the efficacy of sacred rite, and efficacy in transforming human relations which is independent of the powers to which explicitly religious rituals are addressed."¹⁸ Confucius used ritual to represent the basic framework within which all human affairs are to be conducted so as to comply with the Way of Heaven

and promote both moral uprightness and social stability. It is for this reason that when he was asked by one of his disciples the method of achieving what is right, Confucius offered this admonition: "Do not observe anything that is not in compliance with ritual, nor listen to it, nor speak it nor act upon it."¹⁹ Ritual was thus the guiding principle for all actions, private and public. It was seen as the means by which the enlightened person establishes his character and cultivates his individual virtue, as Confucius said: "If the gentleman pursues broad learning with respect to culture, and restrains himself by means of ritual, he may also avoid exceeding the limits of right."²⁰

According to Confucian theory, ritual, with its strictly choreographed performance and assigned roles for participants, was the ideal model for state and society. The prescribed roles of leader and follower in the ritual performance mirrored the hierarchy of Confucian society based on the Five Cardinal Relationships. As such, Confucius had "faith in the power of trained manners, customs, and rituals to harmonise attitudes and open the inferior to the influence of the superior."²¹ In terms of government administration, so strong was the perceived link between ritual and social order that Mencius declared, "If ritual is not adopted, then there will be chaos between those above and those below."²² Furthermore, as social relations assumed an air of ceremony, the idea of a preordained order to all things was reinforced. In this way, "with perfect ritualisation of life we would understand our place in community and cosmos."²³

From the Confucian perspective, ritual had the power internally to transform individuals who adopted its outward forms and attitudes. It also had the power to create social order by reinforcing hierarchical norms that assigned roles for individuals to play in any given situation. The association between ritual and the state in Confucian China was so inextricable that it was said, "One can know the polity of a state by seeing its ritual."²⁴ Within the context of the state, adherence to ritual was the criterion used by scholar-officials to determine the acceptability of religious sects, such that "the Chinese state's policy toward sectarian religions . . . stressed action rather than belief."²⁵ More specifically, "it was not philosophical or theological but practical political consideration that was the leading motivation for the traditional antagonism toward heterodoxy."²⁶

Religious or cult practices that could be used to mobilize practitioners to antigovernment activity were the main source of concern for officials ever on the defensive against seditious heterodoxy. By contrast, "[b]eliefs that were not translated into political activity (in the form of cult organizations, pilgrimages, and festivals) were not of immediate concern."²⁷ Moreover, "Chinese officials spent relatively little time investigating the belief systems of fringe religions; it was the behavior of adherents, especially antistate behavior, that drew the wrath of the emperor."²⁸ Viewed in this light, we can more easily understand why Liu

Zhi's book on ritual, and not his book on metaphysical philosophy, drew the attention of the *Siku quanshu* editors, the arbiters of Confucian orthodoxy in their day.

In the larger context of society, ritual was seen by most Confucians as the single most important factor in creating social order and harmony, by guaranteeing that all members of society functioned according to a single set of conventional rules. These rules, disseminated and inculcated by means of ritual to and among all strata of a hierarchical society, were the building blocks of a unified culture, which helped differentiate the core of civilization from the barbarian chaos beyond its periphery. Thus, the *Liji* said that in ancient times "when the Sages arose, they framed the rules of propriety (*li*, i.e., Ritual) in order to teach men, and cause them, by their possession of them, to make a distinction between themselves and brutes."²⁹

The overwhelming Confucian belief in ritual as the guardian of civilization has also influenced modern scholars. Anthropologist James L. Watson has theorized extensively about the role of ritual in Chinese culture and society and has declared, "If anything is central to the creation and maintenance of a unified Chinese culture, it is the standardization of ritual."³⁰ Watson's theory of the pre-eminent role of ritual in cultural unification in late imperial China hinges upon the Confucian idea of "correctness" whereby "following correct forms ensures that one is playing the game of culture by civilized rules and, in so doing, one becomes Chinese."³¹ These norms of late imperial China were based on a pattern established and periodically revived throughout Chinese history. Thus, we may even say that a key to inclusion in Chinese culture and society was the very performance of certain standardized life-cycle rites, especially those associated with marriage and death.³² This would suggest that a community that did not partake of these ritual conventions were *de facto* barbarians, whose practices kept them beyond the pale of civilization.

However, it would be wrong to read the historical situation too rigidly and infer that the arbiters of traditional Chinese culture were utterly intolerant of all diversity in religious praxis. To the contrary, Watson acknowledges that the

performance domain of ritual, in particular, gave great scope for regional and subethnic cultural displays. The system was so flexible that those who called themselves Chinese could have their cake and eat it too: They participated in a unified, centrally organized culture and at the same time celebrated their local or regional distinctiveness.³³

This statement must be understood in the context of Watson's larger argument that practice, rather than belief, was the ultimate criterion for participation in Chinese civilization; it was ritual, rather than a specific creed, that served as the cultural

unifier. In this light, the diversity of religious practice among Chinese peoples, which at first glance seemed, perhaps, to contradict the very notion of cultural unity, is better understood. According to Watson, by “enforcing orthopraxy (correct practice) rather than orthodoxy (correct belief) state officials made it possible to incorporate people from many different ethnic or regional backgrounds, with varying beliefs and attitudes, into an overarching social system we now call China.”³⁴ This China included many sinicized Muslims, especially those living in the central and eastern part of the country. The extent to which they perceived themselves as Chinese, and were perceived as such by “those who took it upon themselves to make such judgements—neighbors, local leaders, or imperial officials,” was largely determined by the extent to which they “played by the rules of the dominant culture.”³⁵ These rules were none other than the rules of ritual.

These rules permeated imperial Chinese society at all levels and were of considerable importance to the workings of the government with its highly stratified, punctilious bureaucracy. Due to the centrality of ritual, the Board of Rites (*Libu*), one of six ministerial boards that made up the central government in imperial China,³⁶ was one of the most influential divisions of the traditional bureaucracy. The jurisdiction of this board included anything to do with ritual, which, ostensibly, might seem to be a limited purview, concerned only with matters of etiquette and ceremony. However, when one considers that, in accordance with the teachings of Confucius, ritualistic etiquette and ceremony governed and/or accompanied virtually every facet of public life in imperial China, the boundaries of the board’s powers were expansive. It was charged with regulating imperial ceremonies and worship, which meant that it controlled the imperial calendar governing all the emperor’s public rites, and even aspects of his personal life, such as setting auspicious dates for weddings, the timing of nuptial relations, etc. For this purpose, the Board of Rites exercised control of the Bureau of Astronomy. The board also determined orthodoxy with respect to acceptable objects of worship. It further wielded tremendous power in foreign diplomacy. All relations with foreign embassies were conducted in the context of the tributary system (in which subordinate nations paid obeisance and tribute to the emperor). The Board of Rites served as the equivalent of a Foreign Ministry and prescribed the amount of tribute to be paid and the procedure for its delivery, without which diplomacy and trade were impossible. The ministers of the board, under the title of “managing barbarian affairs,” determined which foreigners were and were not acceptable to be received at court, and in a crude facsimile of a Foreign Office, specialists in protocol would teach uninformed foreigners the “usages of the Empire,” including how to get down on all fours when kowtowing to the emperor. Finally, the Board of Rites played an important role in the perpetuation of the imperial bureaucracy itself, presiding over the civil examination on the national level for the

conferral of *jinshi* degrees to successful candidates once every three years. While the Board of Administration was responsible for the actual appointments to posts, the examination system produced qualified officials and also allowed those who did not receive an appointment to become state-sanctioned poets, historians, or chancellors in their provinces. Thus, the Board of Rites was virtually in charge of maintaining the ranks of the literati class itself and determining which scholars' work was acceptable according to the state standards of orthodoxy. An endorsement from one of its ministers would have served as confirmation beyond dispute of a book's legitimacy. Thus the editors of the *Siku quanshu* could not help but take notice of Xu Zhou's laudatory remarks and grant Liu Zhi's work on ritual an honorable mention in the catalogue of the imperial compendium. The worthiness of other Han Kitāb books notwithstanding, the decision of the *Siku quanshu* scholars secured for the *Tianfang dianli* a supreme status among all Chinese Islamic literature.

LIU ZHI'S CHINESE PERSPECTIVE ON ISLAMIC RITUAL

Interestingly, although he epitomized the Chinese Muslim literati that sought accommodation of Islamic belief and practice with the dominant Confucian tradition, in the *Tianfang dianli* Liu Zhi voiced his opposition to the wholesale adoption of certain popular Chinese customs by Muslims. For example, with regard to funeral and burial practices, he was a strict proponent of maintaining normative Islamic practices that constituted orthopraxy throughout the Muslim world.³⁷ By extension, he objected strongly to Chinese customs that in any way violated the implementation of the letter of Islamic law as it concerned rituals of mourning. He described in great detail the sequence of rites, from the treatment of loved ones on their deathbeds to the extended protocols of ritualized grieving in the years and months after burial. He included all the familiar Islamic practices, from the ritual bathing of the corpse to the use of the burial shroud, the use of a transportation bier, the shape and dimensions of the grave, funerary prayers and supplications, and sacrificial offerings made on behalf of, and not to, deceased relatives.³⁸ Moreover, he specifically rejected the adoption by some highly assimilated Muslims of Chinese practices such as clothing the deceased in special burial garments, the use of a coffin for burial, and the burning of offerings to be enjoyed by the spirits of dead relatives and ancestors in the afterlife.³⁹

What is particularly interesting about Liu Zhi's rejection of Chinese Muslims' adoption of these and other practices is the manner in which he justified his stance. He did not reject them solely on grounds that they were un-Islamic and without sanction in the Qur'ān and Sunna. In fact, in his entire discourse on

the subject, such objections never appear at all. Rather, he based his arguments on classical Chinese sources, suggesting that the ancient Chinese sages and their righteous followers never endorsed these practices and that their emergence and acceptance by later generations represented a corruption of the original Way. In essence, he claimed that certain contemporary Chinese customs, no matter how well established they may have been in tradition, were in fact inconsistent with the practice of the Chinese sages. This argument mirrors those made by the Jesuits in China, in particular Ricci, who claimed that the true, original Way of the sages must have been identical with the norms of Catholic belief and practice.⁴⁰ Liu Zhi, in a now familiar formulation, thus argues that the Teaching of Islam, which is in principle completely consistent with that of the Chinese sages, maintained pristinely the original intentions of the Way.

Liu Zhi's attempt to justify the rejection of certain Chinese customs in terms not of Islamic orthopraxy but of Confucian orthodoxy seems to fly in the face of Watson's theory of standardized religious practice as a unifying force in Chinese culture. The assimilation of certain segments of the Muslim population in Ming-Qing dynasty China had conformed to the theory: By adopting common Han Chinese customs, many sinicized Muslims thereby participated as members of society in the unified culture. However, the Chinese Muslim scholars associated with the Han Kitāb actually sought to stem the tide of such assimilation and curb the perceived threat of a complete loss of Islamic identity. They did not resort to a fundamentalist rejection of all Chinese traditions in favor of Islamic ones, but rather invoked the moral and intellectual arguments of classical Confucian doctrine. After all, many of the Chinese Muslim literati who produced and embraced the Han Kitāb corpus were themselves from highly sinicized Muslim families, and so an outright rejection of Chinese beliefs and practices was no more an option for them than denying their own heritage. Moreover, any such rejection made on the grounds of Islamic superiority would surely have elicited the harsh rebuke of Confucian officials interested in social stability and could have brought about the condemnation of Islam or even the persecution of Muslims.

By portraying Islam as a correlative to the Teachings of the ancients, the Han Kitāb scholars could build their argument that Islamic practices were a legitimate expression of the universal Way. In so doing, they showed their allegiance, on the level of ideology, to Confucian principles, even if they rejected certain Chinese practices. Their argument, based on classical Chinese sources, was that these practices violated the ideals of the ancient sages, which they, like their orthodox Confucian colleagues, revered. Chinese Muslim scholars were joined in this view of certain popular religious practices by members of the Confucian literati elite, whose official attitude may have been to regard many such customs with disdain as common superstition and anathema to orthodoxy. Even so, the same elites

were capable of multiple and diverse ritual commitments. When not representing the state in an official capacity, and no matter how orthopractic they were in the performance of their official duties, elites were known to have participated to one degree or another in “popular” religious practices, which may have included Daoist and Buddhist rituals and other regional customs.⁴¹

Among the literati of late imperial China were those like Liu Zhi and the other Han Kitāb scholars who, however Confucian in their rhetoric, also undertook deep study of Buddhism and Daoism and/or practiced foreign religious rites of Islam or Judaism or, in a few cases, converted to Catholicism, while still retaining their orthodox commitments. Even more commonly, literati elites participated in the “popular” customs of their home regions, because had they not done so they might well have forfeited the leadership positions that their families had built over generations in their local society. Government officials also tolerated unorthodox religious practices deemed innocuous where these promoted regional social stability and order among the masses.

Similarly, Liu Zhi could co-opt the Confucian principle of ritual while deftly interpreting it in a manner that justified his rejection of certain popular Chinese customs and his advocacy of a return by Muslims to Islamic orthopraxy. In the context of this interpretation, it was not the specific performances of traditional rites that was important, but rather the ideal of ritual that was at the core of the teachings of all sages, whether Chinese or Western. Liu Zhi incorporated his notion of the universality and ubiquity of sagehood, influenced by such Confucian thinkers as Mencius and Lu Xiangshan, with his very Chinese acceptance of the primacy of ritual to arrive at his unique Chinese expression of Islam. Thus, he could write:

Although the Principle is here expressed in a book about Islam, it is no different from what is found in the Confucian canon. Observance of the ritual of Islam is like the observance of the Teachings of the past sages and kings. The Teachings of the sages are the same in the East as in the West, and united in the present as in the past. However, later generations have neglected them and, as a result, they have gradually been lost. It is only due to good fortune that the ritual of Islam alone has been preserved.⁴²

Having thus established the parameters of his discourse on ritual early on in the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi would revisit this theme as he found it necessary in subsequent sections where he dealt with specific rites and customs. In his chapter on marriage and wedding ceremony, for example, he acknowledged the importance of rites associated with the life cycle as aspects of the Way of Man.⁴³ He

then went on to describe the universality and orthodoxy of the generic principle of ritual, even as he justified differences between the specific practices of the Confucian and Islamic traditions:

From ancient times until today, from the sages to the ordinary people of the world, none can go beyond the reach of ritual, nor abrogate its responsibilities. To abrogate these would be to approach heterodoxy. The ritual of the “Pure and True” [i.e., Islam] comes from the Teaching of the Arabian sage, and yet agrees in many ways with the ritual of the Confucians. Although the practices are particular and the customs are different, and there are also minor details in which they are not alike, for the most part they are generally similar to each other. Therefore, in my preface to ritual, I have explained the points of this matter frequently by using originally Confucian language to elucidate the meaning, wishing only for the people of this land [i.e., China] to know what I have explained.⁴⁴

Liu Zhi affirmed the revered Confucian concept of ritual even while rejecting specific ritual practices of the Chinese tradition. This position, which skirted the line between an emphasis on orthodoxy or orthopraxy, could be seen as clashing with Watson’s theory of standardized ritual practice as the unifying factor of Chinese culture and the determining feature of Chinese nationality. However, I believe it is possible to reconcile a perspective such as Liu Zhi’s with the main idea behind Watson’s argument and maintain the assertion that sinicized Chinese Muslims were active participants in the unified culture of China that had the notion of ritual at its core. First of all, Watson himself concedes that standardization of ritual does not preclude the possibility of “regional and subethnic cultural displays” subsumed under the general rubric of Chinese civilization. The Chinese Muslim perspective on ritual expressed by Liu Zhi in the *Tianfang dianli* can be seen as such a display.

Although Liu Zhi promoted Islamic rites and customs that differed in their particulars from parallel Chinese practices, his reverence for the principle of ritual cannot be questioned. Operating on a level different from that of popular religious practice, Liu Zhi was consistent with the exponents of Confucian orthodoxy who upheld ritual as the crucial unifying factor of Chinese civilization. And like the Confucian literati, who were more interested in the underlying principle of ritual than its specific outward forms, Liu Zhi fully embraced the view that “rituals change people and things,”⁴⁵ which echoes the words of the Confucian official Xu Zhuo in his preface to the *Tianfang dianli*: “Ritual is that by which things are accomplished.”⁴⁶ And Liu Zhi’s own acceptance of this principle is evident when he

quotes the sage Muḥammad as saying: “Ritual is that which establishes a human being as human,”⁴⁷ a statement that itself echoes the words of Confucian classics.⁴⁸

Liu Zhi’s perspective therefore makes better sense in the context of literati views on the principle of ritual than in the realm of popular religious practice. Liu Zhi and other Chinese Muslim scholars of his bent shared more in common ideologically with members of the Confucian literati elite than either group shared with the Chinese masses in general. Muslim and non-Muslim Confucian literati alike affirmed the transformative power of ritual as an abstract concept without necessarily fixating on the particulars of performance as it played out “on the ground.” In fact, as we have seen, there is considerable evidence of elite participation in what we generally called “popular” religion and a blurring of lines between what scholars used to divide clearly as “high” and “low” cultures. We know that elites consulted fortune tellers and believed in auguries, participated wholeheartedly in Three Teachings rituals and organizations, and in other ways “violated” the standards the “pure” Confucianism that they claimed officially to represent. Ultimately, this view may be reconciled with Watson’s theory if we subscribe to the idea that elite and popular perspectives, albeit different, can coexist and even overlap within a society and culture without invalidating one another. After all, Watson does state that “to be Chinese is to understand, and accept the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life cycle, namely, the rites of birth, marriage, death, and ancestorhood.”⁴⁹ He did not say that all Chinese people must abide by a single code of religious practice, only that they “accept the view,” or in other words recognize the principle of ritual that undergirds a unified, but not necessarily monolithic, culture.

Viewed in this way, Liu Zhi’s Confucianized Islamic discourse on ritual, which included discussions of the rites of passage enumerated above, may be seen not only as meeting Watson’s qualifications, but also as upholding one of the most basic principles of the Chinese tradition. Liu Zhi’s act of writing the *Tianfang dianli* itself connected him to an important Confucian literary genre, namely, ritual manuals. The ancient classics established the norms of ritual practice, and Confucius had laid down the ideological framework for emphasizing the socially and individually edifying function of ritual behavior. However, since these classical texts were accessible only to the scholarly elite that studied them in depth and had the philological training to understand them, later scholars, in order to make their lessons available to a wider audience, began to compose works of a more popular nature. Beginning in the late Ming and continuing in the early Qing period, “officials and educated men wrote handbooks presenting the normative rituals, culled from earlier compendia, to the population at large.”⁵⁰ Liu Zhi’s book on ritual fits within the historical context of Confucian ritual manuals of the period, resembling those works in its underlying motivation.

**‘IBĀDĀT AND ĀDĀB: “RITUAL” AND
“PROPRIETY” IN ISLAM**

At the time it was written, the *Tianfang dianli* was the only Han Kitāb book that focused exclusively on Islamic rites and customs. According to Liu Zhi, his father, Liu Sanjie, had written (or translated) a voluminous work on ritual practice under the title *Tianfang lifa*. Liu Zhi described his father’s motivation for taking up the subject of Islamic religious practices: “My late father thought that ritual law was not understood clearly.”⁵¹ Both father and son had expressed a concern about the state of Islamic learning among Muslims in China and felt that this situation required immediate remediation. As Ding Chenglong wrote concerning the state of Islamic knowledge in China in his postscript to the *Tianfang dianli*: “Even those who are quite adept in the scriptures can do little more than narrate and recite them with the right intonation. Among them are few who thoroughly understand the ritual law, and who from time to time also discuss it.”⁵²

Conscious of this deficiency, Liu Sanjie therefore laid the foundation for his son’s definitive book on the subject in Chinese. Since the *Tianfang lifa* on which it was based is no longer extant, the *Tianfang dianli* is actually the only known Han Kitāb text that can be classified strictly as a work of Islamic law. Yet, as a book concerned generally with the sacred law, it is actually narrow in its focus, dealing specifically with the rules of Islamic ritual performance and the customs and manners of daily conduct. In Islam, the concept of sacred law, or *sharī‘a*, encompasses all aspects of Muslim life, from acts of worship and devotion connected with the individual’s relationship with God, to social issues affecting the Islamic community, or *umma*, as a whole. The *Tianfang dianli* hardly deals at all with the far-reaching civil, political, or penal aspects of the *sharī‘a*, these matters being beyond the purview of concerns facing Chinese Muslims living under a non-Muslim regime.

Liu Zhi covered in the *Tianfang dianli* not only acts of worship subsumed under the conventional understanding of rites (e.g., prayer, pilgrimage, or sacrifice), but also other religious practices (e.g., fasting and almsgiving) and etiquette of daily living ranging from eating and drinking to how one earns a livelihood. In traditional Confucian thought all these practices are to be governed by the principle of *li*, with its concomitant ritual attitudes that confer a sense of moral propriety on all human activities. Liu Zhi demonstrated his appreciation of the overlapping values of Islam and Confucianism with respect to quotidian practices in the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*:

With regard to the eight actions: seeing, hearing, speaking or remaining silent, eating, resting, waking, and living—all aspects of one’s daily

routine, whether great or small—for all of them there is the eternal law. If one takes these rules and customs as one's guide and model, then one will not reach the point of having deeds which go against one's proper station, or which exceed the limits of ritual propriety.⁵³

In the Chinese notion of ritual, therefore, Liu Zhi found a perfect correlative for the idea that Islam is not merely a religion, but an all-encompassing way of life. The Chinese term *li* was understood to refer not only to particular religious performances, but moreover to the ceremonious attitude that Confucianism prescribes as the proper comportment for all human affairs. Similarly, in Islam, there is the belief that worship of God is not confined only to the Five Pillars and religious practices, but may be extended to include all of life's activities, provided that one approaches them with God-conscious piety (*taqwā*) and the proper devotional intention (*nīya*). It is with this understanding that Islamic sacred law is seen as governing all facets of life.

The correlation between the Chinese teachings on ritual and Muslim notions of devotional piety is crucial to our understanding of the *Tianfang dianli*, simultaneously a repository of Confucian ethics and an expression of essential Islamic values. This correlation is implied throughout the *Tianfang dianli* by Liu Zhi's particular usage of the term *li*. The English translation "ritual" is used to stand in for the multiple meanings conveyed by the single Chinese word *li*. Similarly, because Liu Zhi did not spell out for us any particular corresponding Islamic translation of this term, we must infer from the content and context of his work to what Arabic or Persian term he was referring. Generally speaking, Liu Zhi used the term *li* in both the practical sense of specific rites and religious observances, and more abstractly to refer to the general ethos that is to inform the life of pious Muslims, including human social relations. Liu Zhi's dual usage of the Chinese term *li* corresponds to one of two technical Islamic terms, namely, *'ibāda* (pl. *'ibādāt*) and *adab* (pl. *ādāb*).

Ibāda refers to the specific obligatory and recommended practices by which the devout Muslim serves God and may generally be defined as "acts of worship." Some of these practices in fact spill over into areas of human activity that the outside observer may not immediately consider "religious" because they are not obvious manifestations of the practitioner's direct and personal relationship with God. However, in Islam, even such mundane matters as routines of personal hygiene are "religious" in the sense that they are stipulated in the Qur'ān and/or Sunna of the Prophet.

In the context of Islamic sacred law, even these "secular" acts are religiously prescribed or proscribed. Thus, if not ritual per se, they are at least ritualized, in the sense that they are to be performed correctly and regularly and their performance

is governed by rules derived either from scripture, prophetic tradition, or opinion sanctioned by the traditional methods of Islamic jurisprudence. In this way, all spheres of human action may be subsumed under the religious rulings of the *sharī'a*. The notion that *'ibādāt* may include far more than the obligatory ritual practices of Islam and that all actions may, and ideally should, be sublimated into acts of service to God, is especially important in the context of practical Sufism. Liu Zhi, though not a member of any known Sufi order, was heavily influenced by theories coming from Sufi sources, and the Sufi view of worship can definitely be detected in his writings. His belief that service to God is the basis of all actions is thus well established in the tradition and is related to the idea of the faith that undergirds Islamic practice.

A second Arabic term, *ādāb*, seems to correspond to the more abstract conception of the Chinese *li* as “propriety,” or “decorum.” Although we can continue to render *li* as “ritual” in English, we must bear in mind its dual sense as both specific religious practice and as the spirit that underlies practice, the attitude or comportment with which it is carried out. The Arabic *ādāb* corresponds, more or less, to this latter meaning. Murata goes so far as to equate *ādāb* with *li* under the English translation “propriety” rather than “ritual.” She does so in the context of discussing corresponding Confucian and Sufi notions of personal cultivation, which is effected by the practices of body and mind, where the body is “the foundation for human consciousness and the basis for all human relationships” and “must be trained to act correctly in all circumstances and to observe the propriety (*li*, Arabic *adab*) in every situation.”⁵⁴ In this context, Murata’s translation is completely valid and consistent with the parallel ideas in Confucianism and Islam that all actions, whether ostensibly secular or overtly religious, ought to be performed with a ritual consciousness, or in the spirit of worship.

As Murata and William Chittick describe it, “*Adab* is an extremely rich concept that can be employed to bring out the whole ethos of Islam.”⁵⁵ In its generalized usage, its connotations, though based on ideas of etiquette, developed within the context of Islamic spirituality “to signify proper discipline of the soul and correct modes of activity. Primarily, this meant proper training and education in all the domains of Islamic learning and practice that were necessary for a person to achieve the ideals of his religion.”⁵⁶ Exoteric religious authorities, the *‘ulamā*, tended to equate *ādāb* with the customary practices of the Prophet’s Sunna. However, it was also “adopted as an ideal by all the learned and, to a large extent, by everyone who underwent an Islamic education.”⁵⁷ Consequently, in colloquial usage in Islamic society, “to say that a person has *adab* means that he or she is cultured, well-mannered, sophisticated, and, in general, has good breeding.”⁵⁸ This general meaning of *ādāb* resonates strongly with the Confucian cultural ideal of ritual as propriety.⁵⁹ In much the same way that *li* was employed by Confucian

philosophers and scholars to justify social hierarchy in Chinese civilization, the “term *adab* was applied to the proper mode of conduct for every group of people in society and to all the appropriate activities considered individually.”⁶⁰ In Islamic civilization, *ādāb* likewise became an essential subject of legal scholarship and ritual instruction.⁶¹

The multiple religious, ritualistic, legal, and aesthetic senses of *ādāb*, which remained quite apart from one another in the intellectual traditions of exoteric Islam, converged in the esoteric discourse of Sufism. This synthetic understanding of the concept is aptly summarized by Murata and Chittick:

Adab is a codification of right activity that, depending on the context and the focus, may be concerned strictly with the *Shariah*, or with philosophic ethics, or with the moral implications of the Sufi stress upon the inward domain of doing what is beautiful. . . . [W]orks on *adab* combine attention to activity with attention to right attitudes and morality.⁶²

In the hands of Sufi thinkers, *ādāb* became central to the idea of the mystic path and a byword for the very ethos of Islam, such that one Sufi master, Abū ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sulamī (d. 1021), went so far as to declare that “the entirety of Sufism is *ādāb*.”⁶³

The concept of *ādāb* came to occupy such a prominent place in both the practical and theoretical teachings of Sufism that it prompted the production of “an enormous amount of erudite literature that addresses *adab*—its importance for strict Sufi adherence, practice, beliefs, law, ethics, and philosophy.”⁶⁴ Of course, theories of *ādāb* were concerned principally with the proper attitude and comportment guiding actions, and consequently Sufi texts on the subject “were written in a context of disciplinary rules for spiritual seekers so that they might connect the tenets of Sufism with *adab*.”⁶⁵ As Qamar-al Huda writes: “Sufi *adab*, unlike other ‘secular’ types of *adab*, worked within an esoteric and exoteric epistemological context, and the search for truth was more than a contemplative or an intellectual exercise.”⁶⁶ The interlacing of theory and practice in much Sufi discourse on *ādāb* meant that its purview was expanded to cover all facets of Muslim life. This perspective contributed to the continued blurring of boundaries between conventional and mystical Islam such that, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sufis routinely valued and wrote about ideas of conventional orthodoxy and orthopraxy and the average Muslim had absorbed many mystical notions from the surrounding cultural milieu. Consequently, any division of exoteric-esoteric or conventional-mystical Islam had effectively disappeared in the Islamic world by the period of the height of Han Kitāb production. For Sufis and the large swath

of the Muslim population influenced by Sufism, *ādāb* came to be regarded as the guiding principle of Islam par excellence, in much the same way that *li* functioned in Confucian culture. It is in this context that the Sufi master ‘Umar al-Suhrawardī (d. 1234) wrote of the indispensability of *ādāb* to Islam in general: “Where *adab* is not found there is no law, no faith, and no God consciousness.”⁶⁷

For Muslims generally, a kind of spiritual *ādāb* was a necessary complement of *‘ibādāt*, serving as the proper comportment and mindfulness that assure the correct performance of acts of worship. At the same time, other types of “secular” *ādāb* regulated actions and relationships in society. The Sufis went even further in emphasizing the ritualized behavior of *ādāb* and did not make the same distinction between the sacred and secular spheres of activity. They regarded *ādāb* as the inner core of all relationships: between the servant and God, between master and disciple, and between fellow members of human society. Similar to the Confucian understanding of *li*, the Sufi understanding of *ādāb* treated it as the basic modality of all human action, transaction, and interaction, including, though not limited to, the formal religious practices classified as *‘ibādāt*. In this way, the interrelated concepts of proper ritual and social comportment (*ādāb*) on the one hand and regulated, specific religious practices (*‘ibādāt*) on the other were essential to Muslim life and Islamic intellectual discourse, and as the Sufi perspective came to be increasingly diffused among Muslim populations at large, the interconnection of *ādāb* and *‘ibādāt* was likewise strengthened in the popular consciousness.

THE *TIANFANG DIANLI* AS CHINESE ISLAMIC RITUAL MANUAL

The centrality of ritual worship in Islam is clear from the primacy of the Five Pillars in religious discourse. All five of these practices or observances are mentioned in the Qur’ān and the details of their procedures spelled out in the Ḥadīth. According to the Prophet, they form the foundation of Islam, and in some instances he even said that they *are* Islam. Building upon this foundation, the structure of Islam also consists of innumerable other obligatory, supererogatory, and recommended religious acts, recognized by the orthodox tradition. Islamic scholars over the centuries have emphasized the centrality of religious practice in Muslim individual and communal life. They have devoted much literature to discussions of the scriptural support for this view, to theories of the relative importance of some practices over others, and finally to manuals outlining the details of correct performance. These manuals of Islamic religious practice were designed to teach scholars how to instruct Muslims in what they need to know to fulfill the ritual requirements of their faith and to navigate through daily life in a manner consistent with basic religious values. The genre of ritual manuals, an outgrowth

of the Islamic juristic tradition, became one of the most widely published forms of literature, with hundreds of texts written and circulated throughout the Islamic world from the medieval period onwards.

In the central Islamic lands, law manuals gained popularity among scholars after a period in which legal discourse had grown highly sophisticated and increasingly complex.⁶⁸ Various schools of law (Ar. *madhhab*, pl. *madhāhib*), each with its own methodological emphasis, produced tomes of legal literature. Treatises were devoted to the establishment and testing of the schools' methodologies by applying them to hypothetical cases. These were useful in helping scholars to apply standards of interpretation to a wide range of legal problems. However, the Islamic sacred law was fundamentally characterized by "the ethical imperative of living it on a daily basis" and the scholars' main responsibility was to help laypeople to arrive at a "clear practical answer to the question: What does Allah expect of one?"⁶⁹ Intricate treatises on legal methodology, while important in establishing the parameters of jurisprudence, were not of much use to local magistrates or imams responsible for the guidance of their communities.

To address this need, legal scholars in the medieval period began to write shorter works that condensed the thought contained in the volumes of earlier scholars of their given schools of law. The thirteenth-century jurist Yaḥyā ibn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nawawī (1233–1277) is an example of one who undertook such a project. Although he also wrote lengthy and detailed works expounding the thought of al-Shāfi'ī (767–820), the founder of his *madhhab*, al-Nawawī also produced a brief guide to the essentials of faith and ritual practice, *al-Maqāṣid*. Such manuals were "authored in their brevity . . . as an aid to students memorizing them, rather than to give Muslims a basic guide to the rules of Islam."⁷⁰ Their primary purpose was to help students who came from smaller municipalities, neighborhoods, towns, and villages to acquire, in a relatively short time, a basic understanding of legal methods and sources, as well as a limited number of specific rulings. They could then take this learning back to their hometowns and "give reliable answers based on qualified scholarship to most of the questions in Sacred Law they encountered."⁷¹ Thus, through a process of successive distillations, the erudition of the doctors of Islam eventually reached the masses of Muslims, who then had a law, based on the sacred law, that they could follow in their daily lives.

In many ways, Liu Zhi's motivation and methodology in writing the *Tian-fang dianli* mirror those of the writers of the popular religious manuals of the central Islamic lands. Inspired by his father's wish to make the ritual law better understood by Chinese Muslims, Liu Zhi engaged in a process similar to the one undertaken by scholars like al-Nawawī. According to Liu Zhi's own characterization of his book, it was a distillation of numerous tomes of Islamic learning. And thus he described his motivation for and method of distilling this knowledge:

A reader asked: “If the list of volumes is vast and numerous it is a hardship to the reader. Why not select only the most essential items so as to benefit the beginning level reader?” Therefore, I selected from the whole body of literature those things most relevant to quotidian matters of people’s livelihood and concerns. I have brought these together under a single cover, calling them the “Selected Essential Rites.”⁷²

It would appear that Liu Zhi’s interest in making his book accessible to the “beginning level reader” meant that he saw his readership as being made up of scholars and students. That he frequently addresses scholars (*xuezhe*) throughout the text, however, suggests that he did not expect it to be read by lay believers at large. Liu Zhi would have been well aware that his audience was self-selecting since most Chinese Muslims at the time, like most Chinese people generally, were illiterate. So, like the classical jurists who had composed the Islamic legal texts and manuals, some of which served as his Arabic and Persian sources, Liu Zhi disseminated knowledge through a scholarly network to people who could address the exigencies of Muslim communities on the local level.

The *Tianfang dianli*’s distinction as the only text in the Han Kitāb corpus devoted exclusively to law is made more poignant when one considers that practical religious manuals had already existed in the Islamic world for more than three centuries before Liu Zhi. Jurisprudence was one of the most highly developed branches of Islamic learning. Its writings constituted an enormous portion of the total body of classical Islamic literature, and of that portion, law manuals had made up an increasingly large percentage since the medieval period. Despite the preponderance of discussions of the sacred law in the scholarly literature of the Islamic world, however, Chinese Muslim scholars did not take up this weighty subject as the main focus of a text until Liu Sanjie composed his *Tianfang lifa*, inspiring his son to write the *Tianfang dianli*.

With the composition of this definitive work on Islamic law in Chinese, Liu Zhi thus linked himself to an important classical tradition of Islamic scholarship and introduced the literary genre of the Islamic ritual manual in Chinese. In the content and scope of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi’s work paralleled that of medieval manual writers of Islam. Like them, he began his work with introductory remarks about the significance of religious practice. Then, mirroring the methodology of the classical manuals, Liu Zhi began his discussion of ritual by placing it within the historical context of the sources of Islamic faith and practice and within the theological and epistemological context of the essential tenets of Islamic doctrine.⁷³ Although he wrote in a classical Chinese idiom, his pattern of beginning a discussion of practical matters with a discussion of the theoretical

substratum of religion was wholly consistent with the methods of Islamic jurists and scholars.

After presenting the theology and epistemology that form the basis of Islamic practice, Liu Zhi embarked on his discussion of the Five Pillars.⁷⁴ In the manner of the classical manual writers, he presented these as the fundamental acts of worship that frame Muslim life. Making this presentation distinctively Chinese, though, he couched the discussion of the Five Pillars in Neo-Confucian cosmological terms that are far more evocative of theoretical Sufi philosophy than anything one would find in most exoteric sources on Islamic orthopraxy. For instance, Liu Zhi described the *wugong* (lit. “Five Meritorious Works”)⁷⁵ in Chinese terms of cultivation of the Way: “The vessel of form had no sooner been completed than the Way of Heaven was hidden. . . . The Five Meritorious Works of the sage’s teaching—recitation, worship, fasting, alms, and pilgrimage—showed the people how to cultivate the Way and return to their primal state.”⁷⁶ As he proceeded to discuss the specific details of the Five Pillars, Liu Zhi further drew inspiration from Neo-Confucian ideals of self-cultivation, which he effectively syncretized with Sufi notions of annihilation of the ego and subsumption in God:

If people can comply with these five, then they should cultivate them. When one frequently recites (the confession of faith), one will successfully be able to return to the truth. When one frequently prays, then one may comprehend the route of return. When one fasts, one severs one’s attachment to worldly things and turns towards the Way. When one pays alms, one gives up selfish interests and selflessly uses one’s personal property. When one performs the pilgrimage, one goes from what is distant to what is near, and from what is outside to what is inside, returning, as it were, to the position of clearly understanding the original substance. The exoteric aspects of the pilgrimage yet retain the outward signs of running hither and thither, but its inner dimension makes the pilgrim one with the substance of the True Master, without leaving a trace of the individual. How could there be anything to surpass these meritorious works of cultivating the Way?⁷⁷

Liu Zhi’s discussion of the essential Islamic practices and observances relies heavily on his division of the contents of the *Tianfang dianli* into two main topical sections. As he describes in his preface: “The central portion relates the particulars of the Teaching, including the Five Meritorious Works of the Way of Heaven [and] the Five Cardinal Relationships of the Way of Man.”⁷⁸ Liu Zhi identified the Five Pillars of Islam with the Confucian concept of the Way of Heaven (*tiandao*): “The Five Meritorious Works are the totality of cultivating the Way. These are the

ordinances and methods of completely unifying Heaven and humanity.”⁷⁹ Representing the Way of Man (*rendao*), on the other hand, in the subsequent chapters he discussed the cardinal relationships of Confucianism, which he referred to as the “five standards” (*wudian*).⁸⁰

The concept of the Five Cardinal Relationships comes directly from Confucian philosophy. However, in his discourse Liu Zhi syncretized this basic notion of Chinese culture and society with Islamic social mores and customs in order to demonstrate that Islam and Confucianism shared the same ethical ground. Once again, he introduced the discussion in cosmological terms, interpreting the primordial human relationship between Adam and Eve in the language of Neo-Confucian metaphysics: “After Heaven and Earth came into existence, the myriad creatures were born. After the male and the female came into existence, the human race emerged. Thus, the husband and wife are the primary pairing in the Way of Man.”⁸¹

However, even as he characterized the Five Cardinal Relationships as “the inherent nature of the Principle of Heaven,”⁸² thereby expressing their universality, Liu Zhi also attributed their establishment to the sage Muḥammad. Given his uniquely syncretic interpretation of the basis of universal social norms, Liu Zhi maintained his connection to the Islamic intellectual tradition even while engaging an ostensibly Confucian theme. Thus the discussion of social relationships and hierarchy in the *Tianfang dianli* also paralleled similar discussions found in the classical manuals of Islamic law. For example, we may cite the *Iḥyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) by Abū Hamīd Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī (1058–1111 CE), which includes a chapter on the “Ethics of Companionship (and Fellowship with the Various Classes of People).”⁸³

Liu Zhi’s usage of the term *li* brought his writings in line with an orthodox Confucian tradition that revered the concept of ritual and devoted a genre of literature to its exposition. The *Tianfang dianli* may therefore be considered the “most Chinese” work of the Han Kitāb corpus. Reflecting the great importance attached to orthopraxy in Islam, and bearing a strong structural resemblance to the genre of classical Islamic manuals of religious practice, the *Tianfang dianli* also stood out as the Chinese heir to the tradition of Muslim legal literature. Moreover, like the first half of al-Ghazzālī’s *Iḥyā’*, the *Tianfang dianli* may also be seen as a book generally devoted to two key, interrelated concepts of Islamic religious practice: *‘ibādāt* and *ādāb*, which Liu Zhi implied in his usage of *li*.

The book’s view toward the theological and metaphysical bases of religious acts is further evidence of Liu Zhi’s homage to the Islamic intellectual tradition, which similarly connected notions of faith and practice. Moreover, his attention to the idea of ritual as a means of self-cultivation evokes both Neo-Confucian *xinxue*, the study of the heart/mind, and the traditions of practical Sufism. Bringing

together the diverse strands of Confucian and Islamic ritual law, as well as Chinese and Sufi metaphysical philosophy, Liu Zhi succeeded in weaving a work that was at once quintessentially Chinese and Muslim, reflecting the fundamental simultaneity of his dual intellectual heritage.

The layout of the *Tianfang dianli* displays its debt to Islamic literature, although, as we shall see below, some of its specific content conveys an unmistakably Chinese quality. Modeling the organization of his work on classical Islamic ritual manuals, Liu Zhi began the *Tianfang dianli* by discussing the epistemological and theological bases of Islamic practice. In his first chapter on the origins of Islam, he took the opportunity to discuss the life and virtues of the Prophet Muḥammad. This discussion foreshadows the full-length biography he would write years later and is reminiscent of the chapter at the very center of the *Iḥyā'*, in which al-Ghazzālī presented the Prophet as the model for Muslims to follow in their religious practices and other actions.

In the discussion that follows, we shall see how Liu Zhi drew upon both Islamic and Confucian models as inspiration for the layout of his book by beginning his treatment of ritual praxis with a theoretical justification for practice that focuses on cosmological, metaphysical, epistemological, and theological issues. The content of this portion of the *Tianfang dianli*, as well as the subsequent body of the text dealing with specific matters of Muslim religious law and ritual activity, also blends ideas drawn from the author's dual heritage, as it translates Islamic concepts into Neo-Confucian classical Chinese.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRIT OF RITUAL AND THE LETTER OF THE LAW

That the *Tianfang dianli* is predominantly concerned with what may be termed Islamic orthopraxy is clear: sixteen of the twenty *juan* into which Liu Zhi divided his work are devoted to ritual law and other matters of practical performance. Liu Zhi's emphasis on ritual in the *Tianfang dianli* is a reflection of the importance attached by the Islamic tradition to correct performance of religious rites and observance. Yet in his presentation of Islam, Liu Zhi also consciously correlated his Islamic heritage with the dominant Confucian paradigm, under which all serious intellectual activity was conducted in the cultural milieu of his day. Confucianism has traditionally emphasized orthopraxy as much as, if not more than, doctrinal conformity. Despite their acknowledged emphases on ritual practice, though, neither Islam nor Confucianism may be accused of promoting only rote ritual performance.

In fact, a sense of orthodoxy exists in both traditions and is intimately and inextricably bound to notions of orthopraxy. Thus Evelyn Rawski's observation "that belief and performance are very difficult to separate" is as true of Islam as it is of the Chinese tradition.¹ Both Confucianism and Islam also advocate a sense of piety and consciousness, without which ritual practices are considered to be devoid of merit or efficacy. Therefore, within the rich Confucian and Islamic literary traditions, treatises on ritual are almost always preceded by discussions that lay the theoretical, or "spiritual," foundation upon which practice is to be based.

Muslim legal texts frequently begin with sections on correct intention, valid approaches to knowledge, theology, and other fundamental aspects of faith. Likewise, Confucian scholars have often prefaced their books on ritual with

metaphysical discussions. In both traditions, the “spirit” underlying orthopraxy is emphasized alongside the “letter of the law.” Liu Zhi adopted this very approach for his *Tianfang dianli*, a clear demonstration of his Chinese-Islamic simultaneity. His choice to begin a presentation of the ritual law of Islam with several theoretical chapters on the origins of the religion, metaphysics, epistemology, and theology exhibits his debt to the two sides of his intellectual heritage.

**“PRESENT, BUT AT A DISTANCE”:
THE RITUAL SPIRIT IN CONFUCIANISM**

The concept of ritual, or *li*, occupies a cardinal position in the Confucian tradition and refers to more than the mere mechanical performance of ceremonial rites. Perhaps more importantly, it refers to the state of mind with which one is to conduct oneself and the manner of comportment that is to govern one’s actions, not only in the actual ritual performance, but at all times and in all settings. Watson, who has regarded orthopraxy as *the* defining element of Chinese cultural identity, concedes that “it is impossible to isolate beliefs from practices in real societies. All unified cultures must have a set of shared beliefs that underpin collective rites.”² The unified Chinese culture of which Watson writes may be galvanized by a body of common practices, but life is breathed into these practices by the beliefs that inform and inspire them.

The emphasis on ritual in the Confucian tradition can be traced all the way back to Confucius himself and the way he interpreted the traditions of the revered ancient sage-kings. Confucius regarded revival of the Way of the ancients, especially their ritual, as the cornerstone of a program to restore social harmony. As A. C. Graham put it, Confucius had “faith in the power of trained manners, customs, and rituals to harmonise attitudes and open the inferior to the influence of the superior.”³ For Confucius there was “no more excellent method than the rituals for making those in authority secure and the people well-ordered.”⁴ In addition to that, he valued the ability of ritual to help govern human passions and promote balanced emotional states, thereby helping to advance the goals of personal cultivation.

These social and didactic functions of ritual were clearly more important to Confucius than any supernatural efficacy attributed to it. Even though the ancient writings spoke of sacrifice and worship directed at spiritual beings and helping secure blessings for the practitioners or quelling divine wrath, Confucius remained ambivalent in his stance toward such beliefs. Generally, he avoided speaking directly of divine or supernatural matters.⁵ Confucius’ reluctance to speak openly about the question of spiritual beings does not constitute an outright denial of their existence, but it certainly reflects an emphasis on the world of human affairs.⁶

His ambivalence concerning the supernatural is summed up in his answer to a disciple's question about the nature of wisdom, to which he replied: "To devote yourself to what is appropriate for the people, and to show respect for the ghosts and spirits while keeping them at a distance can be called wisdom."⁷

Not rejecting the spiritual realm, but clearly shifting the focus of his teachings onto the human realm of social and political relations, Confucius' philosophy has been viewed as quintessentially humanist. Nevertheless, Confucius' spiritual ambivalence should not mislead us to the assumption that his reverence for ritual was nothing more than compliance to the strict "letter of the law" and therefore altogether devoid of "spirit." For Confucius, *li* was intimately connected to the concept of *yi*, or right (or appropriateness), which constitutes the true, intrinsic value of an act.⁸ Rites and ceremonies had their inner meaning as well as their outward form, and the latter is, ideally, to act as a vehicle for the former. Confucius implied in his teachings that ritual contains multiple layers of significance. The most important of these was its role as a device for harmonizing relations between people and bringing order to society.

We may read in the teachings of Confucius and his disciples a progressive move away from ancient religious beliefs (regarded by many later Confucian scholars as superstition) and toward a more materialist worldview within the framework of a civil society. Confucius himself, however, did not explicitly deny the possibility that ritual simultaneously operates on both a spiritual and social level. He never went so far as to demystify ritual completely by removing all reference to the supernatural forces and entities to which it was ostensibly directed. Rather, he sought to harness the human religious impulse, to maintain the aura of a spiritual presence in an effort to promote the didactic and socializing functions of ritual. Specifically, he encouraged one to maintain in one's performance of rites the reverent bearing befitting actual worship. Thus he taught: "The expression 'sacrifice as though present' is taken to mean 'sacrificed to the spirits as the spirits are present.' But the Master said: 'If I myself do not participate in the sacrifice, it is as though I have not sacrificed at all.'"⁹

In modern terms, one might characterize the humanistic trend detectable in the philosophy of Confucius as a form of agnostic pragmatism. After all, it maintains the possibility of the existence of divinity but suggests that its reality is unascertainable and therefore not worthy of speculation that might divert one's attention from the exigencies of life in society. Subsequent generations of Confucian thinkers carried the development of this idea in various directions, including metaphysical speculations that the Master had avoided. Mencius (Mengzi, ca. 372–289 BCE) believed *ren*, or benevolence (also translated as "humanity" or "humaneness"), to be inherent in all people, but that it must be cultivated through learning and ritual and, above all, by adherence to the principle of right.

The Mencian worldview later became the basis of the orthodoxy propounded by the Song dynasty Neo-Confucian masters, who found in its abstract notions of spirituality the foundation for a metaphysical response to the challenges of Daoism and Buddhism. With respect to ritual, Neo-Confucian ideology accepted the Master's premise that "human beings are similar in their natural tendencies, but vary greatly by virtue of their habits"¹⁰ and therefore prescribed the ancient forms of ritual as the practical means for achieving social order and personal virtue.

In order to stem the tide of popularity of Daoism and Buddhism, the Song Neo-Confucians had to come up with a philosophy that addressed not only the collective needs of social order, but also the spiritual aspirations of individuals. In short, they would have to offer a metaphysical system that could rival those of the non-Confucian teachings. As much as they condemned Buddhism and Daoism as heterodoxies, the Neo-Confucians also co-opted and assimilated many of their metaphysical concepts into a synthetic doctrine that revered Heaven, portrayed as the abstract spiritual power of the universe. The Song Neo-Confucian renaissance thus had a strong metaphysical orientation. Thus, from the Song period onwards, the Neo-Confucian emphasis on metaphysics and speculative philosophy required that even practical writings inevitably highlight theoretical concerns and allude frequently to doctrinal matters. In many Neo-Confucian books on ritual, discussions of practice are preceded by explications of underlying metaphysical principles.

INTENTION AND FAITH: PILLARS OF ISLAMIC RITUAL

In similar fashion, the opening chapters of Islamic legal texts customarily do not deal with praxis, but rather with matters of epistemology and doctrine. Euro-American scholarship on Islam has in the past characterized it as a religion of empty ritualism that emphasizes only the "letter" of the law while neglecting its "spirit."¹¹ Yet the fact that Muslim scholars so often address doctrine in their writings before embarking on discussions of praxis provides evidence to the contrary. There is an undeniable emphasis on correct practice that runs through Muslim legal traditions, but this should not blind us to Islam's sense that religious practice has powerful spiritual underpinnings.

In *The Vision of Islam*, Murata and Chittick offer a useful way of viewing Islamic belief and practice, inspired by the Muslim "insider's" perspective on religion. They write that according to "the Islamic understanding, religion embraces right ways of doing things, right ways of thinking and understanding, and right ways of forming the intentions that lie behind the activity."¹² They base this claim on a famous Ḥadīth in which some of the Prophet's companions witness an unidentified visitor come to Muḥammad and ask him several questions

on various aspects of his belief and practice. After the stranger's departure, the Prophet told his companions that "he was Gabriel who came to you to teach you your religion."¹³ The archangel first questioned the Prophet about three terms: *islām* ("submission"), *īmān* ("faith"), and *iḥsān* ("perfection"). On this basis we arrive at a vision of Islam that operates on three interrelated dimensions, where "submission" is religion as it pertains to acts, 'faith' is religion as it pertains to thoughts, and 'doing the beautiful' (i.e., perfection) is religion as it pertains to intentions."¹⁴

This interpretation, grounded in canonical sources, challenges the older "outsider" characterization of the religion as one that "empties all religious acts of spiritual life and meaning and reduces them to rites and ceremonies."¹⁵ Rather, many Muslims see in Islam a holistic view of religion as a way of life, in which action is informed by belief and the correctness of both is assured by purity of intention. Right intention (Ar. *nīya*) is seen as the cornerstone of faith and practice, as confirmed by another oft-cited Ḥadīth that frequently appears at the beginning of texts on Islamic ritual and law: "Actions are judged only by intention, and every man shall have but that which he intended."¹⁶ Specific intent is required by Islamic law in order to validate any act of worship or religious observance. This ritualized formulation of intent has been seen by some observers as confirming claims of a rigid formalism in Islam. However, the fact that *nīya* "is done 'with the heart' and may or may not be expressed 'with the tongue'"¹⁷ suggests that it is more than a superficial ritual ornament. Indeed, as "a pervasive, subjective, individual, 'internal' component of ritual . . . *niyya* seems to be a good place to look for a 'deep' or 'spiritual' component of ritual" in Islam.¹⁸

The Qur'ān also warns Muslims against the perfunctory, vain, or insincere performance of ritual when it declares, "Woe to those who pray, but are unmindful of their prayers, who practice only to be seen by others."¹⁹ On numerous occasions the Qur'ān also expresses the inseverable link between faith and practice, as when it states that "mankind is certainly in loss, except those who believe and perform righteous works."²⁰ In this common Qur'ānic refrain, believing always precedes performance. This subtle element of phrasing is significant, as it demonstrates unequivocally that from its foundational sources, Islam puts belief before action and binds both with the prerequisite intention.

This notion of the "inner" dimensions of intention and faith preceding the "outer" dimension of submission and religious practice actually pervades the tradition. It is thus no accident that Islamic legal manuals so frequently begin by citing the Ḥadīth about intention. It is also by design that the writers of these texts organized them so that discussions of epistemology, theology, and articles of faith precede the nitty-gritty details of correct praxis. In the typical arrangement, discussions of ritual law invariably begin with the Five Pillars of Islam. In this

fact too, we see that belief takes precedence over action, for the first pillar, the *shahāda* is, in fact, a declaration of the essential tenets of Islamic faith.

By the simple utterance of the *shahāda*, a Muslim announces to God and the world that he or she believes in the oneness of Allah and the divine commission of Muḥammad; the remainder of Islamic faith rests upon these two basic premises. And yet while the *shahāda* is at its core an expression of faith, it is also an act, “the fundamental act upon which all Islamic activity depends.”²¹ The *shahāda* is the bridge between faith and practice. This is why it is the first of the Five Pillars and why this simple act is recognized as the sole initiation rite required for one to enter Islam. In fact, it is generally agreed that pronouncing the *shahāda* “is all that is absolutely necessary for one’s Islam to be accepted by God.”²² It is also believed, however, that this declaration is but the first step in the path of submission and that its utterance must be based on sincere intent, “which makes the remaining four pillars incumbent” on the believer, together with all other religious duties.²³

In the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi confirmed the primacy of the *shahāda*, but also acknowledged that it must involve more than mere physical performance, as he wrote: “The ritual law applies to recitation of the mouth, whereas approaching the Lord occurs within the heart and mind. Therefore, this single act of recitation is the first meritorious act in the cultivation of the Way.”²⁴ According to Liu Zhi, proper performance of the *shahāda* requires that one truly know its meaning and to believe in the Principle behind it:

If one is to recite this phrase fully, then one should know its meaning. If a believer recites it vocally, but is not aware of the reason behind it, would this not be tantamount to someone who had not recited it at all? Therefore, knowing the meaning is included within the ritual law. It may come second in the sequence of regulations, after the utterance of one’s mouth, but in terms of drawing near to the Way of the Lord, it is actually primary. Why? Because in terms of one’s responsibility to approach the Lord, the mouth is secondary (to the heart and mind).²⁵

Liu Zhi’s view is completely consistent with the standard Islamic ideal that sincerity of intent is the basis of practice and, together with understanding and true belief, constitutes the innermost dimension of Islam. It is the core of *iḥsān*, or “perfection,” which Murata and Chittick refer to as “doing what is beautiful.” According to the “Gabriel Ḥadīth,” when questioned by the angel as to the meaning of *iḥsān*, the Prophet replied, “It is to worship Allah as if you see Him, for although you cannot see Him, verily He sees you.”²⁶ The Ḥadīth clearly describes a state of mind, a manner of comportment, in which one is to go about one’s religious practice. The idea that God is watching all that one does (and is judging

the intent behind it) is meant to instill in the faithful a sense of piety, a perpetual consciousness in one's heart of the inescapable presence of Allah. While it is clearly based on a far more affirmative faith in divinity, this Ḥadīth nevertheless evokes Confucius' description of the proper state of mind in which one is to practice the ritual. Both traditions call for presence of mind and speak of what we might call today "creative visualization" of the unseen as a means of generating piety and reverence.

It is clear that neither Confucianism nor Islam endorses rote performance of ritual. Thus Liu Zhi, reflecting both Confucian and Islamic notions of piety and proper comportment, explained in Chinese terms that Islam "considers reverent service to be a cultivated skill."²⁷ He elaborated on this idea:

"Reverence" means that there is nothing one says or thinks without conscious awe of the Lord. "Service" means there is no action that is carried out in disobedience to the Lord. To revere the Lord is the cultivated skill of the mind. To behave in obedience to the Lord when acting is the cultivated skill of the body. Thus reverence is the basis of serving, while serving is the function of reverence. When the mind is reverent, serving can be achieved. If one serves without reverence, then to serve is like not serving at all. Therefore, if one serves one's sovereign with reverence, one is loyal. And if one serves one's parents with reverence, one is filial. If one is reverent in one's seeing, hearing, speaking, and acting, then one will comply with regulations and follow rules, and, naturally, one will never reach the point of having nothing to take hold of or to follow. Neither will one be guilty of impropriety. The cultivated skill we have thus far been discussing is extremely subtle and minute. It is extremely strict and tightly knit. As for fulfilling human potentiality and bringing it into accord with Heaven, it is done in this way. And as for emulating the sages and worthies, it is also done in this way. Therefore, in every case, following the sage's Teaching and submitting to the Lord and Master, one must first become calmly reverential, and that is all. With such reverence, everything one does will be good.²⁸

Liu Zhi thus articulated the notion, shared by Islam and Confucianism, that action must be based on pious intent and that piety is expressed through practice. In the process, he conflated the Islamic notion of *taqwà*, or God-consciousness, with Confucian ideal of loyalty (*zhong*) to those in authority above one. His statement, "If one serves without reverence, then to serve is like not serving at all," is clearly an allusion to the saying of Confucius cited above, while his reference to

“impropriety” is also evocative of the *Lunyu*.²⁹ And what is this “impropriety” to which Liu Zhi refers? The Chinese term I have thus translated is *feili*, literally “not conforming to ritual.” Here, Liu Zhi asserts that by achieving *jing*, “reverence,” one necessarily avoids the *feili*, which has not only practical, religious import, but also wider social, political, and even metaphysical implications. The concept of ritual is so deeply imbedded in Confucian society and culture that to neglect or dishonor it is to lose one’s moral rectitude. Moreover, for Liu Zhi this concept of ritual is a syncretic conflation of Confucian and Islamic notions of right intention and correct practice, which is not only at the heart of this passage but also at the core his overall discourse. Thus this passage, replete with Confucian principles, is also an excellent example of Chinese-Islamic intellectual simultaneity, with its unmistakably Islamic reference in the final phrase to one’s every action being “good” evoking the Islamic ideal of *iḥsān*.

“THE ORIGINAL TEACHING”: A CONCEPTUAL OUTLINE OF THE *TIANFANG DIANLI*

Despite Liu Zhi’s overall emphasis on Islamic ritual law, the *Tianfang dianli* is not exclusively devoted to matters of religious practice. It also addresses themes of a more abstract, theoretical nature. The opening lines of the first chapter are unequivocally metaphysical, describing God in his solitude before the act of creation: “At first there was the great beginning. Created beings had not yet appeared. There was only the One True Master. There was neither direction nor appearance.”³⁰ From there, Liu Zhi embarked on a brief discussion of cosmology, the origins of the world and of humankind, before seamlessly transitioning into a discussion of the origins of Islam in quasi-historical, quasi-mythic terms. He wrote of the Qur’ānic prophets going all the way back to Adam. He then recounted Islam’s early Arabian roots, and in the process touched upon the career and character of the Prophet Muḥammad, dealing with historical aspects of his mission, as well as his virtues and miraculous endowments. Liu Zhi also covered the spread of Islam through much of the known world and its arrival and development in China, an account that includes an admixture of both legendary and factual elements. Underlying all of this, however, as suggested in the title of the chapter, “The Original Teaching,” is the basic idea of Islam as the primordial Teaching of humanity, and a manifestation of the eternal and universal Way, by which the Lord created and maintains Heaven and Earth.

In his introduction, Liu Zhi explained his methodology for organizing his book in Chinese terms, according to which it is divided into twenty volumes (*juan*), comprising twenty-eight chapters (*pian*) and various subsections. To describe the overall structure of the book, he used two important classical Chinese

literary terms: *gang* and *mu*.³¹ These terms frequently appear together to form the compound *gangmu*, which can mean the “general outline” of a text. They can also be read as two separate but related parts of a piece of writing, such as the “subject and predicate” of a sentence, or the “text and commentary” of a book. Liu Zhi’s use of the terms most clearly matches the latter meaning, as indicated by his description of the structure of the *Tianfang dianli*: “The book has a *gang* and it has a *mu*. The main text constitutes the *gang*; the annotations constitute the *mu*.”³² He further explained that several of the main sections within the book were similarly organized, with a “general *gang*” (*zonggang*) initiating the discussions of the “Five Meritorious Works,” “Five Relationships,” and “Daily Customs,” followed by the content of specific chapters, which include detailed notes and commentary.

Liu Zhi stated that the overall structure of the book was that of a *gang* and a *mu*, that is, of a main text and its commentary. What he meant by this is not immediately clear until one reads this elucidating passage:

The “Original Teaching” is the *gang* of the book as a whole; the rest of the book is the *mu* of the “Original Teaching.” Gentle reader, first read the *gang*, and then read the *mu*. Once you have learned what there is to learn from the basic points, you may inquire into the more complex details.³³

We have seen above how the organization of the *Tianfang dianli* also resembles that of classical Islamic legal manuals, many of which begin with discussions of epistemology and theology. Liu Zhi’s work likewise begins with a discussion of the sources of the religion, and this, by his own description, represents the key to the entire book—everything else is, in some way, commentary to that. So Liu Zhi was saying that the central message of the entire *Tianfang dianli* is encapsulated in its first chapter, which traces not only the origins of Islam, but of the universe, concerning itself ultimately with the oneness of Allah and the Way. The remainder of the book, especially the long and detailed treatment of the Islamic acts of worship and other customary practices represents, in Liu Zhi’s estimation, nothing more than a commentary on the relationship between God and humanity.

“THE TRUE MASTER”: METAPHYSICAL THEOLOGY

Liu Zhi thus presented the *gang* of the *Tianfang dianli* in its first chapter, introducing metaphysical, cosmological, historical, hagiographical, and theological themes, which inform the rest of the book and which provide the theoretical foundation for the practical teachings that make up the majority of its content. The second chapter, titled “The True Master” (*Zhenzai*), picks up the theme introduced

in the opening line of the first chapter: A supreme and unique God who created Heaven and Earth and then human beings. “The True Master” is a detailed examination of the idea of Divine Unity (Ar. *tawḥīd*) in terms of transcendence and immanence.

In this section, as we have seen before, Liu Zhi struggled with a crucial problem: The Chinese cosmos, though it had evolved from a metaphysical basis into physical reality, had not been created. How, then, could a creative God be described and explained without complete alienation from the Chinese intellectual context? All the Han Kitāb scholars encountered this dilemma, but none explicitly confronted it in his writing; indeed to do so would have been to admit to a potentially fatal impediment to their harmonization objectives. Instead, much like Ma Zhu before him, Liu Zhi simply glossed over this essential metaphysical incongruity and, as we shall see, grafted the creator, Allah, atop the Chinese cosmological scheme as a prime mover existing before and beyond the vicissitudes of “creation and transformation.” Thus, in this discussion, Liu Zhi could also maintain the classical Islamic distinction between God’s attributes (*xiang*, Ar. *ṣifāt*), by which He is known to His creation, and His transcendent essence (*benran*, Ar. *dhāt*), which is beyond human comprehension.

According to the classical Islamic theological notion of divine unity, God is one in His unknowable essence, or as Liu Zhi conveyed this idea in the classical Chinese idiom:

The original essence of the True Master is not involved in the many manifestations, nor is it mixed up in the various transformations of *qi*.³⁴ Neither does it have preordained fate imposed upon it post-creation. He has neither location nor substance. He is the utmost purity and subtlety, which cannot be named or encompassed by language. Thus, in His essence, He transcends Heaven and Earth and the myriad creatures, being the Solitary One.³⁵

The tradition maintains that the divine attributes, on the other hand, are infinite, though according to tradition a certain number of them are explicitly named in revelations to the angels and prophets. Whereas God in his essence is transcendent and veiled, through His attributes, He is immanent and manifested in His interaction with His creation. According to a Ḥadīth Qudsī frequently cited by Sufis as expressing the ultimate purpose of existence, God has said, “I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, so I created the Creation.” Thus, through the act of creation the transcendent divine essence manifested the divine attributes, allowing God thereby to be known objectively.

Through the manifestation of his attributes, God may be known to His

creatures, who depend on Him in this manifest form for their existence. Liu Zhi expressed this sophisticated theological dichotomy of divine transcendence and engagement in terms highly familiar to Neo-Confucian metaphysics:

[T]he Solitary One is not solitary as a result of abandoning everything. To the contrary, the one does not abandon the ten-thousand in order to be one. Merging all sense perceptions and subtleties of ancient times and the present, It gathers them into the flowing of the Principle of truth. Substance and function are not divided; rather, together they constitute the great transformation. Apart from the Solitary One there is no multitude. Apart from the one there can be no ten-thousand. Thus, It encompasses Heaven and Earth and the myriad creatures, yet in Itself remains the Solitary One.³⁶

However, lest one confuse this notion of the all-encompassing one with radical pantheistic claims, Liu Zhi maintained the more exoteric theological understanding that Allah is entirely independent of His creation. That is, although God may be known by His attributes, by means of which He interacts with His creation, He is not limited by those attributes. As Liu Zhi put it, “the True Master creates and transforms every appearance of characteristics, yet *is not* Himself any appearance of characteristics. He inspires every cognition, yet *is not* Himself any cognition.”³⁷

The passage quoted above is consistent with Liu Zhi’s methodology of syncretizing diverse elements of the Chinese and Islamic traditions. Its fundamental paradox of the “Solitary One’s” creation of a world of diverse phenomena resounds with Sufi undertones, but is expressed in the highly technical vocabulary of Neo-Confucian metaphysics. In discussing the nature of God, Sufi theorists, like other mystics, have frequently seized upon pairings of complementary polarities, opposites held together in a single entity. At first glance, these paradoxical propositions appear impossible. However, instead of opposites canceling each other out, the creative tension of this dialectic captures the otherwise ineffable reality of complete and infinite possibility. Simply put, God can manifest one quality and its opposite because he is not bound by the ordinary concepts and natural laws that govern phenomenal reality. The mystical sense of supreme oneness with infinite facets, which is particularly associated with the Sufi philosophical school of Ibn al-‘Arabī, runs subtly through Liu Zhi’s theology as well. Yet this influence is often oblique and must be inferred from context and from the fact that we know that many of Liu Zhi’s Islamic sources were in fact Sufi texts linked, directly or indirectly, to Ibn al-‘Arabī’s school.

One of the reasons why Sufi ideas in Liu Zhi’s work must be inferred is because of the predominance of the Neo-Confucian metaphysical terminology

whereby his theology is expressed. For example, in the passage cited above, Liu Zhi referred to the merging together of “substance” and “function” in the “Principle of truth.” Substance (*ti*) and function (*yong*) are an important conceptual pairing in Neo-Confucian metaphysics, complementary opposites that represent two interdependent aspects of ultimate reality. Substance is the latent potentiality that underlies all being, the hidden, undifferentiated inner reality. Function, on the other hand, refers to the activation or actuation of substance that produces the observable differentiation of phenomenal existence.

Transcendent reality, sometimes expressed as the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*), the Way (*dao*), or as Principle (*li*), has its original substance (*benti*), which is actuated by the function of the cosmic principles, *yin* and *yang*. All phenomena under Heaven, the myriad creatures (*wanwu*, lit. “ten thousand things”), including and epitomized by human beings, partake of that substance and manifest their own function. Whether viewed macrocosmically or microcosmically, substance and function depend on one another and have been regarded by Neo-Confucian thinkers as two aspects of the same reality. To quote the Song dynasty philosopher Cheng Yi, “Substance and Function come from the same source, and there is no gap between the manifest and the hidden.”³⁸ The complementary duality of the hidden and the manifest of which Cheng Yi wrote is analogous to the relationship between the Islamic concept of divine essence and attributes mentioned earlier: substance corresponds to the essence, and function corresponds to the attributes. Thus, Liu Zhi found in Neo-Confucian discourse on substance and function a mode for expressing Islamic theological notions of God’s transcendence and immanence.

Within the Neo-Confucian philosophical tradition, the pairing of substance and function is related to other similar conceptual pairs. For example, substance has been equated with the transcendent Principle, which Zhu Xi has in turn identified with the Supreme Ultimate.³⁹ Function, on the other hand, has been identified with the dynamic force of *qi*, or vital energy, which is the primal force that invigorates all matter. The unitary *qi* divides itself into the dual cosmic principles of *yin* and *yang*, also complementary opposites. *Yin* and *yang*, also known as the *erqi* (“twin forces”), are then further differentiated into the five phases (*wuxing*), which, according to Chen Chun (1153–1217), “separate and combine in their own way as they operate, producing and reproducing throughout time without cease.”⁴⁰

Thus, substance and function are identified in Neo-Confucian discourse with Principle and vital energy, complementary poles of reality, the former being its hidden or latent aspect and the latter its manifest or actuated one. As Murata has so succinctly paraphrased Zhu Xi, “*Ch’i* manifests *Li*,” which is tantamount to saying that function manifests substance.⁴¹ Liu Zhi fully embraced this Chinese

metaphysical theory, writing, “Substance was established before the activation of the *erqi*. Function was manifested after the myriad creatures were formed.”⁴² Elaborating further on the interdependent relationship between substance and function, with specific regard to the Islamic conception of God, Liu Zhi wrote that the “totality of His substance is function, and the totality of His function is substance.”⁴³

Liu Zhi continued his exposition of this Neo-Confucian metaphysical pairing by introducing into it the notion of temporality: “Substance was established before, function was manifested afterwards. This refers to a temporal sequence of what is implicit and what is explicit. But it is not the case that substance and function have such a temporal sequence in reality.”⁴⁴ This issue of temporality had to be addressed because the Islamic theological tradition maintained God’s eternality, both preceding the creation of the universe and following its eventual end. As Liu Zhi expressed this notion in Chinese terms:

Before the myriad creatures came into existence, there stood the True Master. Therefore, there is no beginning before Him. After the myriad creatures pass from existence, the True Master will endure. Therefore, after Him there is no end. . . . He has no beginning, but He initiated the beginning of the beginning of all things. He has no end, but He decrees the end of the end of all things . . . Without beginning or end . . . He *is* the beginning and the end.⁴⁵

After thus enumerating these essential divine traits, Liu Zhi returned to discussing Allah in the more abstract terms of Neo-Confucian metaphysics. He introduced another pairing of complementary opposites: “movement” (*dong*) and “quietude” (*jing*). Movement and quietude correspond to *yang* and *yin* respectively, as Zhu Xi has explained their cosmic role: “There is no other event in the universe except *yin* and *yang* succeeding each other in an unceasing cycle. This is called change. However, for this movement and quietude, there must be the Principle that makes them possible. This is the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*).”⁴⁶ Liu Zhi thus suggests the equation of Principle, already equated by the Neo-Confucians with the Supreme Ultimate, with the substance of God. Moreover, his usage of the substance-function dichotomy is analogous to the Islamic notion of the distinction between the divine essence and attributes, so by extension, he has implicitly equated Principle/Supreme Ultimate with essence of Allah (*dhātullāh*).

This position appears to differ from the metaphysical schema of Liu Zhi’s Han Kitāb predecessors, like Ma Zhu, who clearly placed Allah, as creator, prior to all Chinese figurations of transcendence, including the *taiji* and even *wuji* (“Beyond Ultimate”). Liu Zhi subtly alters that hierarchy, though there are also instances in

his writing where he seems to follow a course akin to Ma Zhu's, speaking of Allah as a highly personalized deity whose personality precedes any abstract characterization. Liu Zhi fluctuates at times between positing a personal creator, as he must do to remain faithful to Qur'ānic depictions of Allah, and the more abstract conceptions of divinity preferred by Chinese philosophy. By intimating the equation of the divine essence and the highest Neo-Confucian metaphysical entity, Liu Zhi would appear to be making a more Chinese argument than other Han Kitāb writers had done before him, and perhaps he did so, whether consciously or unconsciously, to avoid antagonizing or alienating his non-Muslim Confucian readers. However, this purpose (if this choice was indeed purposeful) was counteracted by affirmations of Allah's personality and conscious will as the creator, by which Liu Zhi acquiesced to the demands of exoteric Islamic monotheism.

Liu Zhi straddled the contradiction between these two positions, but his struggle is easily understood as a manifestation of the inherent incongruities of any grand cultural translation project, as well as the challenges of negotiating a simultaneous worldview. If we find Liu Zhi's theology to be inconsistent or unclear at times, we should remember that within the long histories of syncretism on both sides of his Chinese Islamic heritage, there is ample precedent for this sort of ongoing negotiation and debate over metaphysical concepts and terminology. The arbiters of Neo-Confucianism had similarly disputed amongst themselves over the conceptions of transcendent reality and how the various terms for it fit into a logical metaphysical scheme. Similarly, Islamic philosophers and theologians had long grappled with the subtlety and complexity of the relationship between the exoteric creator of revelation, portrayed anthropomorphically, and more abstract notions of divinity, implied in certain Qur'ānic verses and developed in the historical encounter between Muslim scholars and Hellenistic thought. Even Sufis of the Ibn al-'Arabī school fluctuated in their expressions of divinity, positing a being both transcendent over and immanent within phenomenal reality, alternating between abstract and personal depictions of the absolute.

Yet even as Liu Zhi found Chinese concepts to match with Islamic ones, he was careful not to overstate similarities or portray analogies as outright mutual identity. Even as he strove to conform to the norms of Confucian orthodoxy, he also upheld orthodox Islamic theology. At times, this dual motivation caused him to avoid radical monistic claims, which Neo-Confucianism and certain schools of Sufi thought entertained but which conflicted with conventional tenets of Islam. This implicit tension is evident in his discussion of the twin notions of movement and quietude. For Liu Zhi, these states of reality are obviously related to the pairing of substance and function, for inasmuch as substance is hidden and latent, its prevailing state is quietude, while the manifest and active state of function is movement. Liu Zhi confirmed this connection: "This expression 'movement and

quietude' is analogous to the expression 'hidden and manifest.'⁴⁷ Yet, he cautiously avoided any explicit connection of this duality with God, lest he should inadvertently diminish the unity or greatness of Allah in his discourse. Thus he wrote that the "True Master has neither movement nor quietude. Nor has the True Master movement and quietude."⁴⁸ Rather, remaining within the distinct parameters of Neo-Confucian philosophy, the terms movement and quietude were to be discussed in specific reference to the vicissitudes of "creation and transformation," that is, within the context of phenomenal existence.

In his discussion of movement and quietude, Liu Zhi introduced one more pairing of Neo-Confucian metaphysical concepts: "before-Heaven" (*xiantian*) and "after-Heaven" (*houtian*). Murata identifies these terms as being originally of Daoist provenance and defines them as "expressions referring to the state of existence before this world and existence in this world."⁴⁹ In later Neo-Confucian usage, the terms *xiantian* and *houtian* came to represent the more abstract noumenal-phenomenal dichotomy. According to Jin Yijiu, the discourse on the *xiantian-houtian* dichotomy holds a position of central importance in Liu Zhi's system of metaphysical thought.⁵⁰

Liu Zhi was not the first Han Kitāb writer to adopt the Neo-Confucian terminology of the *xiantian-houtian* dichotomy. In his *Zhengjiao zhenquan*, Wang Daiyu wrote, "That which is before-Heaven is the mandate, and that which is after-Heaven is Nature."⁵¹ According to Murata, "Wang is clearly using before-heaven to designate the realm of reality that is preparatory to the appearance of the world," and she equates this usage to the Sufi notion of the "arc of descent" (*qaws al-nuzūl*), or the "origin" (*mabda'*).⁵² That is to say, Wang Daiyu used the terms *xiantian* and *houtian* to convey the idea of a linear temporality connecting the original noumenal reality, represented by the divine mandate (that is, predestined existence), to the present phenomenal state of existence, or Nature. Although Ma Zhu did not use the terms *xiantian* and *houtian* explicitly, Jin has interpreted passages in the *Qingzhen zhinan* as expressing a similar understanding of metaphysical linear temporality.⁵³

Liu Zhi's use of these terms, while clearly indebted to his Han Kitāb forebears, nevertheless displays an innovative perspective. Although it is a staple of Neo-Confucian discourse, Jin sees in the conception of *xiantian-houtian* a dualistic formulation harking back to Buddhism and even Manichaean Gnostic theories of the "three ages" (*sanshi*), viz., (1) the pre-creation period when heaven and earth, light and dark, good and evil were independent; (2) the middle period when darkness and evil impinge on light and goodness; and (3) the last period when light triumphs over darkness and each withdraws to its own kingdom.⁵⁴ In Jin's view, Liu Zhi's use of *xiantian-houtian* dualism implicitly accepts an evolution from the noumenal to the phenomenal and back to the noumenal. Therefore,

Liu Zhi's usage differs from Wang Daiyu's and Ma Zhu's in that theirs was a rigidly linear conception, whereas Liu Zhi's was cyclical. However, despite the possibility of implicit Buddhist or Manichaeism influences on his metaphysical theories, when speaking of the *xiantian-houtian* cycle, Liu Zhi explicitly rejected any connection to such heterodoxy: "Anteriority and posteriority develop, and are trends repeatedly observed as we begin to observe the subtleties of the emergence of life and the alternation of transformation. However, this is not to be confused with the absurd utterances concerning transmigration, reincarnation and other such notions made by the heterodox sects."⁵⁵

Without question, Liu Zhi regarded his use of the metaphysical discourse on *xiantian-houtian* as completely consistent with the orthodox views of both Confucianism and Islam. If doctrines resembling Daoism, Buddhism, or even Manichaeism were apparent in his writings, their influence was incidental.⁵⁶ Liu Zhi's thought clearly reflects influences from the mystical trends within both Islam and Chinese religio-philosophical traditions, but it was his intention to present a translation of Islamic theology in Chinese metaphysical terms that did not betray the strict demands of pure monotheism. This intent is evident in the following passage in which he incorporated the *xiantian-houtian* duality:

Creation and transformation "before-Heaven" arise from the movement of a unitary, undifferentiated Principle. Creation and transformation "after-Heaven" arise from the movement of a unitary, undifferentiated vital energy. We may take the movement and quietude of Principle and vital energy as an *analogy* for the hidden and manifest attributes of the True Master.⁵⁷

The language of this passage is indistinguishable from standard Neo-Confucian metaphysical discourse. Yet the obvious caution expressed in the final sentence is reminiscent of Liu Zhi's previous statement in which he was unwilling to apply the terms "movement" and "quietude" directly to God. Here, once again, he would not dare dilute the monotheism of Islam by implicating divinity in the dualism of *xiantian-houtian* temporality. For Liu Zhi, the relationship of Principle to vital energy is analogous, but only analogous, to the concealment of the divine essence and the manifestation of the divine attributes. That is, while he constantly implied a connection between Chinese metaphysical conceptions of ultimate reality, he avoided explicitly equating Allah with any inherently limiting classical Chinese term. The concepts of before-Heaven or quietude might have been used to describe the condition of the divine essence before creation. However, Liu Zhi scrupulously avoided any direct application of these terms to his theological formulations because they could have negatively affected the conveyance of the

notion that God is utterly independent of any and all conditions. Thus, Liu Zhi demonstrated a clear intention to portray God as transcendent above not only the creation, but also any man-made concept. Even though such Chinese philosophical terms ostensibly conveyed divine transcendence, he used them with extreme subtlety and caution lest they impinge in the slightest degree on his puristic portrayal of God. Thus, Liu Zhi walked a fine line between the poles of his dual intellectual heritage, emphasizing the analogical quality of certain Chinese philosophical terms in an effort to retain God's supreme transcendence.

Liu Zhi's insistence that certain terms not be applied to his conception of God, or only be applied by way of analogy, is easily enough explained as reflecting his piety or caution. He did not wish to make statements that might be misconstrued as violating orthodox Islamic sensibilities, even though the terminology in question was derived directly from orthodox Confucian sources. Herein lay an obstacle to his complete harmonization of Islam and Confucianism. The fact that the Chinese religio-philosophical tradition lacked a clear monotheistic concept, even though it had no shortage of ideas about and terms for the ultimate reality, presented a problem for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writers in China. Liu Zhi, whose work represents perhaps the most thorough example of syncretism of Confucian and Islamic thought, confronted this obstacle head-on in the opening chapters of the *Tianfang dianli*.

Liu Zhi's discussion of "substance" and "function," "quietude" and "movement," "before Heaven" and "after Heaven," all made with reference to the "True Master," a Chinese epithet for Allah, epitomize the difficulty he encountered in translating Islam into Chinese. Given his upbringing, education, and polyglotism, Liu Zhi no doubt understood Islam as other Muslims around the world did, at least in part, through its Arabic and Persian terminology. But he had to render Islamic tenets not only comprehensible but also shield them from possible charges of heterodoxy in the entirely alien idiom of written classical Chinese. The challenges and dilemmas faced by Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb writers has its parallels in the experiences of ethno-religious minority writers elsewhere, whether German Jews writing in the literary idiom of the European Enlightenment, or American Buddhists today, struggling to translate ideas that are obvious to them yet foreign to their audience. In all these cases, apologists are left with no choice but to resort to using familiar, local, sometimes rigid, and often inappropriate vocabulary to express complex, sophisticated ideas drawn from a richly contextualized, ancient tradition close to the author's own heart. In China, Liu Zhi had plenty of precedents: his Han Kitāb forebears, the Jesuits and Chinese Catholics, the Jews of Kaifeng, as well as the much more distant Buddhists, Manichaeans, Nestorians, etc. But the translator-apologist's dilemma, while universal, is also always specific, constantly renewing itself with the ever-changing

historical, social, and cultural context. And thus Liu Zhi faced unique challenges writing about Islam in early Qing dynasty China while attempting to remain faithful to the “timeless truths” expounded on both sides of his dual intellectual heritage.

As if to punctuate his insistence on upholding both the oneness of God and the unique truth of Islam, Liu Zhi closed the chapter with his exegesis of the quintessential statement of monotheism in the Islamic tradition in language that alternates between abstract and anthropomorphic terms. He translated the 112th *sūra* of the Qur’ān, known as *Sūrat al-Ikhlās* (The Chapter of Sincerity): “The Chapter of Sincerity says: ‘Say: “He is the Lord, the One. The Lord is the Ultimate. Unbegotten and non-begetting. There is no one to match Him.”’”⁵⁸ Liu Zhi followed this translation with a word-by-word interpretation of its meaning and concluded the paragraph by indicating the true purport of this *sūra*: “These are all ways in which to elucidate this fact that the one is singular and unique! If the scholar can comprehend that the one is one, then the intent of this entire chapter may be understood of its own accord, without seeking explications.”⁵⁹

In his “Extended Annotations” (*guangyi*) to this final paragraph, Liu Zhi’s exegesis takes some interesting turns that offer insight into some of the larger issues he intended to address in this theoretical portion of the *Tianfang dianli*. He elaborated on the definition of oneness, which he had intimated earlier. He compared God, the ultimate one, with the numerical one of mathematics. Just as all multiplicity can be reduced to a single common denominator, so too can the diversity of created phenomena be traced back to the ultimate one:

The original substance of the one is unchanging and unmoving. Yet although it becomes numerical, nothing is exhausted or deprived. Thus, as two, it becomes dispersed. As three, it becomes enclosed. As hundreds and then thousands, it divides. As millions upon millions, it is further dissipated. One hundred, one thousand, or many hundreds of millions—none can escape their connection to one, and are themselves contained in that number.⁶⁰

Liu Zhi’s exegesis evokes classical Chinese sources. His description of the undifferentiated one producing infinite diversity is reminiscent of the forty-second chapter of the *Daodejing*: “The Way produced the one, the one produced the two, the two produced the three, and the three produced the myriad creatures.” His statement about the emphasis on oneness in the Qur’ānic passage he was interpreting, moreover, invokes Confucius. Liu Zhi wrote, “The meaning of the entire classic is in this chapter, using the word ‘one’ to penetrate everything.”⁶¹

He also acknowledged the standard Islamic interpretation of *Sūrat al-Ikhlāṣ*:

Some say that the purpose of the “Chapter of Sincerity” is to distinguish truth from heterodoxy. Among the various schools, some say that the Lord is two or three. . . . There are those who say that the Lord begets beings the way that mortal parents beget children. Some schools would say that above that which they call Lord is one who begot Him, and is the father of the Lord. There are, furthermore, those who say that the Lord, although He is the loftiest, cannot stand alone in the position of authority and honor, but rather requires associates and auxiliaries. It is for this reason that the true Lord sent down His mandate, in order to prove the absurdity of these other propositions.⁶²

In this passage, Liu Zhi employed the notion of “heterodoxy,” in Confucian discourse usually applied to Daoism and Buddhism, to distinguish Islam from an even wider field of contenders, reflecting a broader agenda to assert Islamic orthodoxy in contradistinction to any and all forms of heterodoxy. Liu Zhi specifically indicted dualistic and trinitarian doctrines. The former is perhaps a vague reference to Zoroastrian or Manichaean beliefs.⁶³ The latter is clearly a critique of Christianity. In this regard, Liu Zhi was following the example of classical Muslim exegetes, for whom the *sūra* represented, on the one hand, a clear articulation of Islamic theology and, on the other hand, an assault on the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which Muslims consider a particularly repugnant and sacrilegious distortion.⁶⁴ Even though Liu Zhi was very likely influenced by Jesuit writings, especially in their approach to divine nomenclature, he nevertheless took this opportunity to distinguish Islam from Christianity. In similar fashion, he closed the passage with a condemnation of *shirk*, the association of partners with God, considered the only unpardonable sin in Islam.

By adopting these positions, Liu Zhi showed himself to be a champion of exoteric Islamic orthodoxy. Toward the end of this passage, however, he also offers an interpretation of the *sūra* evocative of the Sufi ideal of mystical union with God:

Some say that the “Chapter of Sincerity” speaks to those who seek the Way, and that unity is pure, but duality is adulterated. But the seeker of the Way already has his heart set on the one, so there is no adulteration. If his heart is set on the one, then his advance is also toward oneness. If his advance is toward oneness, then the seeker must consider the True Lord as his final destination. If his final destination is the True Lord, his body and mind dissolve and merge with the original essence of the True Lord.⁶⁵

Yet even after making this mystical statement, Liu Zhi concluded this discussion with an unequivocal assertion of the rigor, orthodoxy, and authoritativeness of his theory and methodology: “One cannot seek another point of origin, so as to shift or deviate from one’s firm certainty. One cannot maintain even the slightest amount of personal bias, intermingling miscellaneous ideas so as to pervert one’s unadulterated purity!”⁶⁶

“RECOGNITION”: EPISTEMOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

After presenting metaphysical arguments for the oneness of God, Liu Zhi proceeded to a discussion of the epistemological dimensions of Islamic theology in the third chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, titled “Recognition” (*Renshi pian*). Thus he shifted the focus from what there is to be known about Allah to why and how it is to be known. This discussion begins with an argument, familiar to Western philosophy and theology, defending the existence of God based on observation of the natural world. After this, however, it quickly shifts to a classical Chinese rationale for this empirical approach, namely, the Confucian emphasis on “fully apprehending the principle in things and extending knowledge.” After concluding that the recognition of God’s existence is the necessary result of empirical observation, Liu Zhi then proceeded to a fascinating discussion of various baseless theories and flawed conjectures that have produced false gods and theological misconceptions. In a demonstration of his erudition, he engaged in a comparative survey of several of the major religio-philosophical traditions in China during his day, and even referred to certain Western beliefs, explaining why their diverse notions of divinity and dominion fail to match the truth of Islam. After thus enumerating all the things that are not the one true God, Liu Zhi returned to a discussion of how one may find evidence of God’s existence in nature, not only in the world at large, but also much closer at hand, especially in oneself. After a brief reprise of some of the metaphysical concepts addressed in his previous chapter, Liu Zhi then cited Islamic scriptural support for his exhortation to seek God in ourselves. Finally, he closed the discussion with a lengthy body of quotations from the Chinese classics and Confucian scholars, which, according to his interpretation, indicate an ancient Chinese belief in God compatible with the faith of Islam.

Liu Zhi’s opening salvo in this chapter expresses a classic theistic rationale, reminiscent of the Western teleological argument for God’s existence: “A work of art must have an artist. The great creation must have a Lord.”⁶⁷ In the commentary that follows, he poetically enumerated various natural wonders cited as evidence of the existence of the creator. Arguments like this, based on the premise that if something exists, someone had to have made it, abound in Western religious and philosophical writings, but are relatively rare in Chinese intellectual discourse.

For this reason, having first introduced a traditional Western argument for the existence of God and offering natural phenomena as his supporting evidence, Liu Zhi subtly shifted to a line of reasoning intended to appeal to Confucian rationalistic sensibilities, asking rhetorically:

If someone observes the sun and moon, stars and celestial bodies, the mountains and streams, and plants and animals all day long, but does not know who their Lord and Master is, then how could he be one who “extends knowledge and apprehends the principle in things,” penetrating the mysteries of Heaven and Earth?⁶⁸

The phrase “extending knowledge and apprehending the principle in things” is one that any literate Chinese reader would immediately have recognized as an allusion to the *Daxue*, wherein a program for self-cultivation and world pacification is outlined, which relies on a foundation of extending knowledge through the investigation of phenomena.⁶⁹ Failure to follow these instructions, Liu Zhi warned, could prevent one from “enlightening one’s mind and seeing into one’s own Nature.”⁷⁰ Moreover, failure to extend knowledge and investigate things could, in the extreme case, prevent one from “following Nature and cultivating the Way.”⁷¹ Liu Zhi then connected the urgency of the Confucian exhortation toward self-cultivation to the necessity of recognizing God’s existence, as he wrote: “People cannot but know that there is a Lord and Master.”⁷² He compared this necessity to natural law, equivalent to the duty of Heaven to cover, or the Earth to support, or the planets to orbit.

Thus Liu Zhi conflated the epistemological necessity of knowing that there is a God with the Confucian moral imperative of learning as a prerequisite to self-cultivation. As he wrote, “If one is unable to amass knowledge and investigate things, then ‘enlightening one’s heart and observing the Nature of things,’ or ‘following Nature and cultivating the Way,’ are all but vain expressions.”⁷³ With these words, Liu Zhi actually issued a tacit challenge to his audience of Confucianized Muslims and non-Muslim Confucians. He questioned the seriousness of their commitment to the core teachings of Confucianism if they limited the extent of their knowledge and their investigation of things not to include Islamic theology. Liu Zhi presented Islam not necessarily as a confessional faith, but rather, in Confucian terms, as a repository of knowledge and a tradition of scholarship. In this passage of the *Tianfang dianli*, he presented this notion concretely, stating that “our Teaching is the study concerned with amassing knowledge and investigating things, and considers recognition of the Lord and Master to be its first priority.”⁷⁴ With this single phrase, he accomplished two things. First, he reconfirmed the concord of Islam with the core Confucian values of learning and cultivation and

secured, by extension, Islam's rightful place within the pale of Chinese orthodoxy. Second, he deftly attached to those very core values the epistemological obligation of theological knowledge, which was otherwise unknown in the Chinese tradition.

Having thus established the necessity of recognizing Allah, as part of the larger moral imperative to self-realization and cultivation of the Way, Liu Zhi proceeded to discuss how one is properly to come to that recognition. The first step toward a correct apprehension of God, according to his methodology, was to eliminate incorrect conceptions of divinity. Methodologies in which an affirmative definition of the divine is arrived at by a gradual process of elimination and negation are not unusual among the world's religio-philosophical traditions. We are reminded, furthermore, that the very creed of Islam, "*Lā ilāha illa 'llāh*," is, in essence, a negation followed by an affirmation: "There is *no* god but (there is) Allah." Liu Zhi's methodology in this section of the chapter follows precisely this essential Islamic formulation.

Before beginning his survey of specific religious beliefs and philosophical concepts in an effort to sift the theological wheat from the chaff, Liu Zhi first identified the major causes of errors in recognizing the true God. In a short paragraph, he generally attributed theological misconceptions to one of two epistemological pitfalls: "those who have not come to know the Lord's truth are either trapped in their dependence on what is visible, or have already fallen into the abyss of emptiness and non-being."⁷⁵ Positing the two extremes of excessive materialism and excessive idealism, Liu Zhi charged both groups with reliance on "baseless imaginings, pernicious knowledge and loathsome perceptions."⁷⁶ On the one hand, he accused the materialists of being "foolish and dim-witted people, who, trapped in the visible, seek the Lord therein, succeeding only in taking a human being to be the Lord."⁷⁷ The idealists, on the other hand, are epitomized for Liu Zhi by the Daoist and Buddhist "nihilists,"⁷⁸ who "seek the Lord beyond what is visible, and succeed only in mistaking their notions of 'emptiness' or 'non-being' for the Lord."⁷⁹ In either case, Liu Zhi found that "those who exceed or fall short" of the more moderate views held by Islam and Confucianism "are too many to count."⁸⁰ In the passages that followed, he discussed several examples in detail.

The first "misconception" Liu Zhi addressed was the religious Daoists' tendency to deify Laozi. In an attempt to establish Laozi's humanity and historicity, he recounted the main points of his biography, based largely on Sima Qian's redaction in the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian). He accused two emperors, Qin Shihuangdi (r. 221–210 BCE) and Han Wudi (141–87 BCE), of having predilections for the supernatural and, therefore, focusing erroneously on ideas of immortality while they attempted to implement Laozi's teachings. According to Liu Zhi, as a consequence of their policies, "there have been people in later generations

who have taken Laozi to be the Lord.”⁸¹ Liu Zhi also accused later generations of “adding and giving forced interpretations” to Laozi’s writings in the *Daodejing*, a charge reminiscent of Qur’ānic claims that Jews and Christians have altered the divine revelations they were given in order to serve their own interests.⁸² In this way, Liu Zhi could try to spare the integrity of the “real” Laozi, much as the Qur’ān exonerates the biblical prophets from the faults of their Jewish and Christian followers. Laozi was not to blame for the accretion of superstition and magic to his teachings nor for being raised to the status of a god in religious Daoism. In fact, as Liu Zhi remarked, such “exaggerated praise far exceeds what is proper, and not only leads people into untenable beliefs, but if Laozi himself heard of this, he too would laugh at their abstruse theories as strange and pointless.”⁸³

Having set the record straight vis-à-vis Laozi and Daoism, Liu Zhi next turned his attention to the Buddha. He recounted the details of the lineage and birth of Śākyamuni and of the highlights of his biography, including his renunciation, meditation, ministry, and death. He did not, however, demonstrate the same generosity with respect to the Buddha as he did with Laozi, making no attempt to “redeem” the reputation of the former as he did in the case of the latter. In Liu Zhi’s estimation, the false theories of Buddhism came directly from the teachings of Śākyamuni himself, as recorded and transmitted by his disciples.

Liu Zhi’s presentation of the basic tenets of Buddhism reveals a superficial, and flawed, understanding of its doctrines. For one thing, he claimed that according to Buddhism, all “events and all beings depend on the imaginings of the mind of the Buddha for their existence.”⁸⁴ It is not clear exactly what Liu Zhi meant by this. However, one may speculate that he was referring to a distorted interpretation of the theory of the Yogācāra, or “mind-only,” school of Buddhism.⁸⁵ Liu Zhi intimated that it was this metaphysical theory that led the “people of the East” erroneously to “take Buddha as the Lord” after Buddhism spread to China under the reign of the Han emperor Mingdi (57–75 CE).⁸⁶ Liu Zhi further summarized the basic tenets of Buddhism, as he understood them:

Briefly, its main points are: To take emptiness to be the principal aim; to consider the world to be illusory; to consider life to be desire; to consider holding onto conventional rules to be absurd; to consider reason to be an obstacle; and to consider extinction and annihilation as the ultimate goal. The Buddhists concocted the notions of the “three vehicles” and “six paths,” and the doctrines of transmigration and re-incarnation, of *karma* and preordained fate, which they say lead one to goodness and nothing more, in order to mislead the stupid and vulgar. They sever the matrimonial bonds between men and women, and lay waste to the enterprise of normal human relationships, substituting

reverence to ruler and father with the idea of transcendence, or liberation. Their mercy to birds and beasts is said to be on account of their universal compassion.⁸⁷

Finally, rather than base his opposition to Buddhist teachings on Islamic grounds, which some in his audience could have dismissed, Liu Zhi ingeniously deferred to the Confucian antipathy toward Buddhism. Thus, implicitly reiterating his belief in the harmony of Islam and Confucianism, he wrote, “As to whether all of this is right or wrong, the Confucians already have the definitive conclusion on that.”⁸⁸

After using a native Chinese critique to dispense with Buddhism, however, Liu Zhi turned his sights on two important Chinese theological misconceptions. The first of these has to do with usage of the term *tian*, or Heaven. Liu Zhi was reluctant to equate the concept of Heaven with God. In this paragraph, he articulated his reservations, which are based on the concern that uneducated people will mistake the physical sky, also called *tian* in Chinese, with the Lord. He referred to this misapprehension as “speaking [of Heaven] by pointing to some image,” an error that caused “ordinary, foolish people not to know this Heaven for what it is, and thereupon mistakenly take the physical heaven to be the Lord.”⁸⁹ As evidence of this popular misconception he cited the fact that “when common folk meet with some calamity, they shout ‘Good Heavens’ or some such expression.”⁹⁰

Liu Zhi contrasted this error of fixating on the physical sky with the intelligentsia’s metaphorical use of the term *tian*. He described this usage as “speaking [of Heaven] by referring to a principle” and approved it because it “tacitly knows the sublime subtlety of Heaven and does not violate what is correct.”⁹¹ He further acknowledged that the Confucian tradition had established this metaphorical usage centuries earlier in the ancient classics, wherein “Shangdi is sometimes called ‘Heaven.’”⁹² Liu Zhi would not eliminate the term “Heaven” completely from his theological lexicon, but he simply wished to assure that that usage did not allow the incursion of heterodox misconceptions. Indeed, in an extended annotation to the third chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, he acknowledged use of the term by the sage-kings of ancient China to refer euphemistically to God:

When we look at the Five Emperors and Three Kings,⁹³ they all revered the Lord on high in their hearts with complete sincerity. Moreover, they called out to Him using precisely the term “Heaven,” as in “Imperial Heaven” or “Vast Heaven.” They similarly spoke of the “Mandate of Heaven” or the “Wrath of Heaven.” This Heaven of which they spoke is none other than *di*.⁹⁴ They were not referring to the physical blue sky. However, they never spoke in detail of how *di* is *di*. From Confucius to Mencius on down, the philosophers no longer

spoke of *di*, but rather they spoke of “Heaven.” Yet, ordinary and simple folk do not attain the highest Principle. They become fixated on the heavens that are physically visible. Sophists, on the other hand, exploit this confusion to foster skepticism. This is precisely how heretics exploit ignorance and allow error to creep in.⁹⁵

Liu Zhi cited the exegesis of the *Yijing* by Cheng Yi⁹⁶ for support of the dual usage of the term *tian*:

Cheng Yichuan said: “As far as Heaven is concerned, if we talk specifically about it, it is none other than the Way. This is the ‘Heaven’ of the saying, ‘Heaven is not to be disobeyed.’ If we want to divide the idea of Heaven, then the physical entity is called ‘sky’ while the Lord and Master is called *di*.”⁹⁷

Liu Zhi fully endorsed Cheng Yi’s position and bemoaned the fact that more people did not learn from it:

[If we understand this distinction] then the idea is clear. Yet, this has not always led people into certainty beyond a shadow of a doubt. On the contrary, it has shown people the road to confusion and ambiguities. They have indeed not yet read the classic writings of our Teaching [i.e., the Qur’ān], which teach how to experience the Lord. And they will not believe without proper evidence, so their uncertainty remains unresolved.⁹⁸

At the end of this passage, Liu Zhi suggested that only Islam maintains theological clarity and that if people would only familiarize themselves with its scripture, they would rid themselves of perplexity on the subject of God. He nevertheless acquiesced that his Chinese readers would require corroboration from sources whose authority they recognized, which is precisely why he labored so extensively to substantiate his claims with citations from the Confucian tradition, including both the ancient classics and their Neo-Confucian commentaries.

The second of the Chinese religio-philosophical concepts that Liu Zhi addressed was that of *li*, or Principle. Simply put, although he himself used the term in his writings, “Principle” was not an appropriate appellation for Allah, as some people erroneously used it. For Liu Zhi, “Principle is the reason behind the existence of things,” but it was not the prime mover, or creator, of everything.⁹⁹ In other words, Principle is an abstract concept that underlies all created reality, but it is a device, or means, used by God, and not God Himself. Liu Zhi drew

an analogy to try to illustrate his point, explaining that “Principle with respect to things is like meaning with respect to words.”¹⁰⁰ By this he meant that just as every writing must have an underlying idea, so too do all created things have Principle. However, just as the idea behind a written work must have an author who conceives it, Principle is itself a conception of the creator. It is a mistake to confuse the device with its inventor and operator, as Liu Zhi asked rhetorically, “How can we say that the idea is itself the author of the words?”¹⁰¹

Unlike the previous case of the usage of the word *tian*, in which he found fault with the thinking of the unlearned masses, here Liu Zhi directed his criticism at scholars. He maintained that nowhere in the ancient classics did the sages equate Principle with God. Rather,

it was later scholars, conjecturing about the nature of Shangdi, who muddled the picture in search of it, without gaining anything. And then departing from image, in search of Him, moreover, they were left without any foundation upon which to settle, so they misused the concept of Principle in this way. Above all, they say that in the world nothing is more revered than Principle. Therefore, they have used it as a name for *di*, without knowing that their theories were altogether inappropriate.¹⁰²

Clearly, the scholars to whom he was referring were Neo-Confucians, for no other school of thought held the concept of Principle in such high regard.¹⁰³ In Liu Zhi’s opinion, the error of these Sophist-like scholars, in contrast to the common folk who were fixated on the visible, was that they allowed their imaginations too much license. They were not guilty of the sin of materialism, which may lead to the error of anthropomorphism, but, rather, theirs was an idealism that led to overabstraction.

Liu Zhi thus completed his survey of the Chinese religio-philosophical landscape, addressing theological misconceptions he found in Daoism, Buddhism, popular religion, and Neo-Confucianism. As if to punctuate this discussion and cover any other misconceptions he did not address specifically, he wrote, “All the things that people conjecture to be the Lord are not the True Lord.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, demonstrating that his criticism was not limited to Chinese traditions, but extended to all false doctrines everywhere, he acknowledged Western theological misconceptions:

To the west of Arabia, there are those who take the sun or moon to be the Master, or who consider a prophet to be the Master, or who worship multiple gods, or who worship fire. Each and every one has

become its own school, creating teachings that are quite muddled. Their writings do not include references to Laozi or the Buddha because they are not known in Arabia. So why is it that some books do? The writings were composed by people from that land, so they speak only about what exists there, and do not cover what does not.¹⁰⁵

Liu Zhi showed himself to be a defender of orthodoxy against heterodoxy in any form it may appear, and of any provenance. His reference to the lack of knowledge of Eastern traditions in the central Islamic lands conveys more than meets the eye. We may infer from it a subtle attempt to explain, conversely, why Chinese writers have not written about Islam, which he was presenting as a repository of orthodox truth. This interpretation is consistent with the general disdain Liu Zhi expressed for those whose doctrines were based solely on speculation, thus reaffirming his own reliance on knowledge from the authoritative sources of both the Islamic and the Confucian canons. He would articulate this position in his comments at the end of the chapter:

An early Confucian said: "If the Way is not clearly illuminated,¹⁰⁶ then heterodoxy will do it harm." I say of the harm done by heterodoxy that it is caused by the failure clearly to illuminate orthodox learning. If one but investigates the ancient classics and clearly illustrates orthodox learning, and returns wholeheartedly to the words of the great rulers, sages and worthies, then heterodoxy may finally be put to rest, and the Principle of the "Pure and True" [i.e., Islam] will be clearly illustrated.¹⁰⁷

In the first half of the third chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi argued that recognizing God is a logical correlative of the Confucian imperative to extend knowledge by investigating things. Then, in a lengthy discussion of how not to formulate a proper understanding of divinity, he enumerated theological misconceptions from various religio-philosophical traditions in China and abroad. He dismissed reliance merely on sense perception and abstract speculation as methods for arriving at theological truth. Instead he identified scripture, empirical observation of the phenomenal world, and logic, used in concert, as the proper sources of sound theology. Having thus established the correct methodology for recognizing God, Liu Zhi proceeded in the second half of the chapter to implement it.

To begin, he restated the premise, previously mentioned in his discussion of the metaphysics of theology, that God "has no appearance, so He cannot be sought in either forms or colors."¹⁰⁸ Even so, Liu Zhi pointed out, the fact that God is

unseen should not lead one to the wrong conclusion that He does not exist, or to confuse His existence with the Daoist theory of non-being or Buddhist emptiness. Once again, he cited the very existence of the creation as proof of a transcendent creator, for, according to his logic, nothing within the created realm could have created itself or been created by any other creature. As Liu Zhi put it: “Heaven and Earth, Man and the myriad creatures were all created. How can any of them be the master of creation?”¹⁰⁹ Liu Zhi identified the “Lord and Master” as the one who “directs creation.”¹¹⁰ This is the logical premise from which he proceeded.

Liu Zhi then reiterated the imperative to know God, but in this instance his emphasis was not so much epistemological as moral and practical. We are to recognize God gratefully as the source of our lives and, with yearning, as our goal after death; this, according to Liu Zhi, is the “only way that things run properly, without defect.”¹¹¹ Such God-consciousness requires practical manifestation, and so

while we do not see or hear Him, we tremble at the advance of the Lord and Master, until we turn to Him with our lives. When we pay homage and perform pilgrimage to Him, then, trembling, we acknowledge that the Lord and Master observes us from above, and we use our bodies in order to turn towards Him completely. Turning towards Him day after day, we are then never far from the Lord and Master. As we turn towards Him from moment to moment, the Lord and Master is also never far from us.¹¹²

With this passage, Liu Zhi provided a preview of the discussion of religious practices that constitutes the majority of the *Tianfang dianli* and confirmed the role of his theology as the foundation for his understanding of ritual law.

Next, he returned to the notion of empirical observation that he introduced at the beginning of the chapter. Although, as he had just reiterated, God cannot be seen directly, his existence may be inferred from the traces He leaves in the visible realm. To illustrate his point, Liu Zhi used the analogy of wind, which cannot be seen either, but whose effects are clearly visible in the bending of a blade of grass. Likewise, “we know that there must be a Lord and Master who silently moves in the midst of all this, and so we cannot be deceived into believing He does not exist.”¹¹³ According to Liu Zhi, “it is none other than the silent traces He leaves behind in the creation and transformation of things that we silently know.”¹¹⁴

This discussion of divine traces visible in the phenomenal world led Liu Zhi to revisit briefly some of the Neo-Confucian metaphysical concepts he introduced in his previous chapter, including substance and function and the related concepts of existence before-Heaven and after-Heaven. Once again, this discussion revolves around the dichotomy of God’s concealment and His manifestation.

The divine essence, or substance, is imperceptible and unknowable. By contrast, God's function, which is manifested in His workings both in the spiritual realm "before-Heaven," as well as in creation "after-Heaven," may be gleaned through revelation, intuition, and observation. As Liu Zhi described this incremental unfolding of knowledge about God as progressing from "that which is revealed to that which is hidden, and from that which is visible to that which is inscrutable, if the mind agrees with this understanding in gradual steps, then what was difficult to fathom is easily fathomed and what was difficult to know is also known. How could one but know and fathom it?"¹¹⁵

Of course, as a Muslim scholar, Liu Zhi maintained that the surest method of knowing God is through the revelations and signs He sends to humankind. Therefore, he quoted from the Qur'ān for the supreme sanction of his epistemology. He translated a Qur'ānic passage that speaks explicitly of God's signs: "He has said: 'We shall send to you our visible tokens in all places, even in your own selves, but why is it that you do not observe?'"¹¹⁶ Then, entering into an exegetical discourse that resounds with Sufi undertones, Liu Zhi made the almost pantheistic (or at least panentheistic) claim that people "regard the Lord and Master as if He were hidden, without realizing that all things between Heaven and Earth are the manifestation of the Lord and Master, such that there is nothing in which one cannot see Him."¹¹⁷

Pursuing this line of argument further, Liu Zhi next cited a well-known Ḥadīth: "The sage has said: 'If one understands oneself, then one understands the Lord.'"¹¹⁸ He presented this tradition as a complement to the ideas expressed in the Qur'ānic passage he had just cited:

On the one hand, the preceding quotation from the classic says that by seeking things from afar, one can see the signs of the Lord. These words of the sage, on the other hand, indicate that by seeking that which is close at hand, within one's very own person, one can apprehend the reality of the Lord.¹¹⁹

In a formulation reminiscent of the theories of the Ibn al-ʿArabī school of Sufi philosophy, Liu Zhi characterized the human being as a "microcosm of Heaven and Earth."¹²⁰ He went on to state that when the human being comes to realize that this analogy is not simply a reflection, but actually an extension of the relationship of God to the creation, then he or she will come to "know profoundly his or her own original nature."¹²¹ By means of the macrocosm-microcosm analogy, once we are able to understand the reason behind our own original nature, "then the reason why the Lord and Master is Lord and Master may be apprehended in the original nature of our very selves, and not outside of it."¹²² The clear implication

is that the “original nature” of all that exists is essentially the same as our own human nature. Liu Zhi’s reference to the “original nature” (*benxing*) of oneself, is reminiscent of the Mahāyāna Buddhist concept of enlightenment as the realization of one’s own Buddha nature, that is, realizing that one does not have any individual nature separate from the essential, unitive Nature shared by all beings, including the Buddhas. Employing similar terminology, Liu Zhi implied a relationship of the individual soul to the divine essence, an idea commonly associated in the Islamic tradition with the philosophy of the Ibn al-‘Arabī school. Like other Neo-Confucians, Liu Zhi included many Buddhist notions (almost all of them either unconscious or unattributed) in his Confucian and, in this case, his Islamic discourse. There is the further intimation, never spelled out explicitly, of an essential relationship between Nature, both individual and universal, and the divine essence. Thus Liu Zhi concluded this discussion with an idea approaching the *wahdat al-wujūd*, or “oneness of being,” theory of the Ibn al-‘Arabī school:

To understand clearly the reason behind our own substance and function is tantamount to knowing the reason why the Lord and Master is Lord and Master. Are these then not extremely close to one another? This is the reason why it is said that the key to knowing the Lord is to know oneself.¹²³

Having skillfully conflated in this chapter the Confucian imperative to extend knowledge and investigate phenomena with the Islamic imperative to know God, Liu Zhi progressed systematically through arguments for God’s existence based on the evidence of Nature and logic, and finally to proofs from Islamic scripture. However, after completing this presentation of the main text and commentary, Liu Zhi demonstrated both thoroughness and an appreciation of his audience by appending supplemental sections to the end of the chapter. It appears that even though his discourse is replete with Confucian terminology, he felt the need to provide further proof for his theological claims drawn from sources that Confucians would consider authoritative.

Liu Zhi thus argued that the term “Lord” and how it is used to refer to God should not be confused with temporal forms of dominion. By quoting multiple verses from the *Shujing*, *Shijing*, *Chunqiu*, and *Yijing* in which Shangdi is mentioned, Liu Zhi attempted to demonstrate that the revered ancient rulers of China believed in God, a line of argumentation remarkably similar to that of the Jesuit Ricci. Unlike Ricci, however, by quoting some of the great Song dynasty luminaries such as Cheng Yi, Zhu Xi, and Chen Beixi,¹²⁴ Liu Zhi intended to show that the founders of Neo-Confucian orthodoxy similarly recognized the presence of God in the ancient tradition at the core of their philosophy.¹²⁵

“PRONOUNCEMENT OF TRUTH”: BRIDGING THEOLOGY AND RITUAL

The fourth and last of the theoretical chapters of the *Tianfang dianli* is titled “Pronouncement of Truth” (*Diyan pian*). This chapter serves as a bridge between the theological foundation constructed by Liu Zhi in the previous three chapters and the book’s overall theme, Islamic ritual law. Having presented the metaphysical terms of his theology in the second chapter, he then established the methodology for recognizing the existence and oneness of God in the third. In the fourth chapter he built upon the themes he introduced in previous chapters, specifically presenting several formulaic Islamic creeds and discussing them in terms of investigating and “pronouncing” the essential truths of faith that had been “recognized” through the methods he had outlined earlier. In the fifth chapter, he would introduce the Five Pillars of Islam. He would delve into a discussion of the first pillar: the formal, ritualized utterance of the *shahāda*, the testification of belief in God and His Prophet, whereby a Muslim establishes and confirms his or her faith. The *shahāda* is the first pillar because the four other pillars, and indeed all subsequent religious practice and observance, rest upon it. In this context, Liu Zhi’s discussion of Islamic creeds and formulae in the fourth chapter of the *Tianfang dianli* serves to give practical relevance to the theological theories and principles established earlier and pave the way for the introduction to the concrete, practical aspects of the ritual law that make up the remainder of the book.

Liu Zhi initiated this discussion by proclaiming the significance of the “pronouncement of truth,” which he described as “the method whereby the teaching of the sage was passed down from mind to mind and heart to heart. It is how one comes to recognize the True Master. It is the one and only clear proof.”¹²⁶ He then presented the “testification,” which he interpreted as the convergence of the physical and spiritual realization of theological truth:

To testify is thoughtfully to bear witness to the True Lord, profoundly knowing His essence. Our testimony is our embodied attempt to seek confirmation of the truth, yet not keep a distance from the artifice of external things. After all, what makes us what we are is nothing but ourselves and our Nature, just these two and nothing more. Whether it be the testimony of ourselves, or the testimony of our Nature, or the testimony of the unified substance of our selves and Nature, these are all sufficient for clearly illuminating the Principle of the True Lord’s utmost reality.¹²⁷

He then presented what he called the “pure and true,” a similar affirmation of

God's oneness and the mission of the Prophet, albeit without the phrase "I bear witness." Liu Zhi explained this subtle difference in terms evocative of mystical union, saying that this formulation "does not use the language of bearing witness. It preserves only the oneness of the Lord and Master, and so completely dissolves the Heavenly Principle, leaving behind no traces of the mutual approach of subject and object."¹²⁸

Liu Zhi also presented and interpreted the classical Islamic creed referred to in Arabic as *'aqīda*, the "particulars of faith,"¹²⁹ which "express specifically the subtleties of meritorious service."¹³⁰ Thus he made explicit the connection between theory and practice and between faith and the ritual law. In particular, Liu Zhi explained the Islamic tenet concerning the hereafter that

if there is life after death, there must be a posthumous resurrection. Certainly one can see this connection. It causes all of the mysteries of meritorious service to appear clearly as if they were right before our very eyes. Thus, because He is beyond time and space, we are unable to meet the Lord and Master face to face, and are unable to immerse ourselves completely in His substance and function.¹³¹

Liu Zhi thus suggested that the purpose of religious practice is to realize the essential articles of faith in this life so that we can prepare ourselves to be properly reunited with God in eternity after we die. Finally, he ended the chapter by discussing formulaic praises of God uttered routinely by devout Muslims.¹³² He described the significance of these sayings as follows:

The great praises are the height of bearing witness to faith. To bear witness to the Lord is to reach the boundary of reality. To believe in the Lord is to grasp entirely His substance and function. This achievement is absolutely pure: the mind is completely focused and does not turn to anything other than the Lord and Master, such that one even sees nothing else, or even a thought or concern for anything else remains. What one sees with one's eyes is only the Lord, and what one's heart yearns for is only the Lord.¹³³

And thus Liu Zhi drew to a close the theoretical chapters of the *Tianfang dianli*, about to embark on his long and detailed examination of the rites, observances, and customs that make up the ritual law of Islam. In this larger context, his final point in the fourth chapter, the bridge between theory and practice, makes sense. Here, after several chapters in which he theologically established Muslims' object of worship, he came full circle to a point he made earlier in the first chapter:

“As a Teaching, Islam considers knowing the Lord to be its highest aim”¹³⁴ and “considers reverent service to be a cultivated skill.”¹³⁵ In this last passage before he would begin discussing the religious practices that make up the content of that service, Liu Zhi referred once more to the concepts that inform it and make for genuine reverence. Thus he wrote of a faith that allows one to grasp the very nature of God, produces a single-minded devotion that fuels all subsequent practice, and gives meaning to ritual.

CHINESE-ISLAMIC SIMULTANEITY IN THE REMAINING CHAPTERS OF THE *TIANFANG DIANLI*

Having thus laid the theoretical substratum of praxis in his first four chapters, Liu Zhi embarked on his specific descriptions of the Five Pillars (in the next four *juan*, followed by a supplemental *juan* on ritual sacrifice and the breaking of the fast of Ramaḍān), which he, like any good Muslim scholar, supported with references to the Qur’ān and Ḥadīth. Unlike classical Muslim writers, however, he supplemented his Islamic sources with direct citations from, and oblique references to, the Confucian canon and other Chinese literature. These sources were especially useful in his subsequent section on the Five Cardinal Relationships (also four *juan*), an essentially Confucian concept, which Liu Zhi conflated with Muslim ideals of ritualized social relationships, also substantiating this discussion with references to both Islamic and Chinese sources.

In the next section (comprising the next four *juan*), Liu Zhi discussed what he termed “popular customs” (*minchang*), a category that corresponds to ‘*ādāt*, or the “customs of daily life,” treated in classical Islamic legal manuals. The chapters cover such mundane topics as where one resides, how one earns one’s livelihood, the disposition of wealth and property, dress, and food and drink. Interested in more than simply reiterating the letter of the sacred law on these matters, Liu Zhi sought to support his discussion with justifications for various prohibitions and injunctions, as he explained that “there is appropriate and inappropriate conduct. This chapter separately relates the ‘whys’ and ‘wherefores’ of each category of behavior, enabling the people to recognize what appropriate conduct is.”¹³⁶ Liu Zhi’s underlying rationale is consistent with the Sufi notion of *ādāb*, or proper comportment, whereby all human actions are to be understood as devotional service to God. In this spirit, Liu Zhi introduced the section by stressing the generosity and compassion of the “sovereign of creation” (*zaowuhuang*) for which all actions should be an expression of gratitude.¹³⁷

His discussion of the daily customs of Muslim life in the *Tianfang dianli* is thus firmly rooted in the traditions of the classical Islamic legal manuals and Sufi *ādāb* literature. But he also demonstrated his uniquely Chinese Muslim

perspective by including justifications for Islamic rules of conduct based on traditional Chinese sources. For example, in his discussion of proper Muslim dress, he discussed the use of traditional Islamic headgear for men. Acknowledging that some Chinese Muslims might avoid wearing such articles for fear of calling attention to their foreign heritage, Liu Zhi quoted from a revered classical Confucian source in order to show that ancient Chinese customs of wearing headgear were originally the same as the Islamic norms he was describing:

The *Zhouli* says: “The Son of Heaven wears a leather cap to oversee the great sacrifice.” The standard illustrations of the Six Classics indicate a cap that is pointed at the top and round at the base, made of deerskin, employing twelve stitches. When compared to the caps of us Muslims, one cannot see the slightest difference. That being so, the regulations for wearing a cap in our two cultures were originally in complete accord. The problem is that people of later generations have not observed them. They do not study the ritual of the ancients and do not wear the clothing of the ancients, so they do not know what the ancients used, and, consequently, they wear different style caps.¹³⁸

Another interesting manifestation of Liu Zhi’s hybrid Chinese-Islamic discourse on customs of daily life comes in the chapters that deal with dietary rules. There has been debate within Islam, as within Judaism, about whether one may promote rational justifications for religious rules about what is lawful or unlawful to consume, or whether faith requires that one simply accept these rules because they are commanded by God.¹³⁹ For most pious Muslims, prohibitions against pork or alcohol, for example, require no further justification than that God has ordained them in the Qur’ān.¹⁴⁰ This orthodox position notwithstanding, even the Qur’ānic verse prohibiting the consumption of pork offers a reason beyond mere divine dictate. The Qur’ān commands the Prophet: “Say: ‘I find in what has been revealed to me nothing unlawful for a person to eat except the meat of carrion, outpoured blood, or the flesh of swine, for verily all of this is filth.’”¹⁴¹ Thus, the scripture invokes the concept of pollution, but does not distinguish ritual impurity from hygienic cleanliness.¹⁴² Nor does the revelation provide any further explanation beyond stating that pork is filthy (*rajisa*), such as an elaboration of what possible harm may come of consuming it.

However, Liu Zhi did not resist the impulse to offer rationalistic explanations beyond mere acceptance of the revealed commandment. Thus he prefaced the entire discussion of dietary law by stressing the harms and benefits associated with various food and drink:

Food and drink are those things whereby one's character and feelings are nourished. By means of their nature, we benefit our own natures. If their nature is good, then they will increase our own good nature. If their nature is evil, then they will add to our own evil nature. If their nature is foul and impure, then they will add to the foulness and impurity in our own nature. The influence of food and drink on the human heart, mind, and character is great indeed! Among creatures there are those with good natures and those with bad natures. Thus, there are things that human beings are permitted to eat and those that they are forbidden.¹⁴³

This rationalization of Islamic dietary law is not based on medical principles or driven by concerns about physical health. And while Liu Zhi did occasionally invoke scientific (or perhaps pseudo-scientific) ideas about the nature of certain foods, his main considerations revolved around metaphysical ideals and moral values.¹⁴⁴

Among his explanations of why certain foods are permitted while others are forbidden, Liu Zhi focused on the consumption of various types of animals. Some of the creatures he discussed, from snakes and insects, to eagles and owls, to leopards and foxes, are ones that modern Westerners might find odd even to consider for food. However, we must remember that different cultures at different times have had dramatically different ideas of what is pure and impure or tasteful and repugnant. Generally speaking, Chinese culture has traditionally shown a tremendous flexibility and openness in what it has deemed appropriate and inappropriate for human consumption. Therefore, Liu Zhi's expansive list of animals to be considered for edibility is quite germane to his cultural milieu.

Pork is not an unusual food item in various parts of the world, and it is particularly a staple source of protein in much of East Asia. At the same time, by contrast, the taboo against pig products in Jewish and Islamic cultures runs deep. Thus, in the historical encounter between Chinese and Muslim (and Jewish) cultures, the issue of pork consumption has represented a great cultural rift and an enormous obstacle to mutual understanding. Simply put, as popular stereotypes on either side of this rift suggest, Han Chinese have often viewed Muslim abstention from pork as suspicious and somewhat off-putting, while Muslims have seen the Chinese appetite for pork as an expression of both physical uncleanness and moral defect.¹⁴⁵

Responding to the prevailing Islamic and Han Chinese views of the issue of pork consumption, Liu Zhi devoted a lengthy portion of his discussion to this subject. His faithfulness to the Qur'ānic prohibition was unequivocal, but he was also clearly sensitive of the need to make a persuasive argument justifying it to his non-Muslim, as well as assimilated and/or lapsed Muslim, readers. For neither

segment of his audience would it have sufficed for him simply to state that pork is forbidden because God has decreed it so. And thus his commentary on the legal prohibition against pork goes far beyond the traditional detailed juridical discussions of what degree of contact with pig products constitutes ritual contamination. Liu Zhi sought to provide a rational argument to an educated Chinese audience made up of both Muslims and non-Muslims.¹⁴⁶

In this effort, Liu Zhi again enlisted the help of Chinese sources in support of his rationalization. His justification of the prohibition of pork conflated the ideas of bodily and moral impurity, emphasizing both the negative physical and spiritual qualities of the pig, which are absorbed by anyone who ingests its flesh:

The pig is especially filthy and foul among the domesticated animals. Its nature is greedy. Its attitude is vile. Its mind is confused. What it eats is abominable. Its flesh provides no nourishment, but causes great harm. The pig delights in what is despicable and foul. It has serrated teeth. It likes to seize things. It chews raw flesh. The more robust it is, the lazier it behaves. . . . Therefore, of all animals, it is the most strictly forbidden to be eaten.¹⁴⁷

Before proceeding with the citation of sources confirming the harms of pork, Liu Zhi acknowledged that non-Muslims do not share the Islamic attitude toward it: “We Muslims alone are strict in our prohibition and avoidance of pork, while other religions consider it a normal food, hence our extraordinary prohibition of it.”¹⁴⁸ In so doing, he clearly indicated that his argument for abstinence from pork would not be made on doctrinal grounds, but rather would have to appeal to rational ideas that non-Muslims would also find convincing.

Liu Zhi therefore focused on claims made in books of Chinese medicine, many with strongly Daoist overtones, which frequently combined actual empirical observations with metaphysical theories. For example, the *Bencao jingshu* (Subcommentary to the Classic Pharmacopoeia) describes pork as being full of toxins that have cumulatively degenerative effects on health. The text attributes to pork such harmful effects as acute gastroenteritis, the accumulation of phlegm, and kidney damage. It also speaks in terms unique to Chinese medicine, such as “giving rise to internal hot winds and fever” and the depletion of masculine vital energy, or *yangqi*, leading to male impotency.¹⁴⁹ It speaks of dangerous food combinations, another concern of traditional Chinese medicine, such as pork eaten together with ginger, causing insanity, and pork together with mooncakes, causing bleeding ulcers.¹⁵⁰ Another source, the *Yijing* (Classic of Medicine), speaks in terms that seem to predict modern concerns about cholesterol and arterial blockage: “Pork obstructs the circulatory system and weakens one’s physique.”¹⁵¹

Liu Zhi cited several more medical and pharmacological texts that list various other ailments caused by eating pork. Almost all of them agree that it is harmful to one's *qi*, or vital energy, especially the *yang* energy that engenders male vitality and potency. Several even make the assertion that consuming pork leads to the conception of fewer sons, a particularly alarming effect given the strong patriarchal values of traditional China. Thus we see that after making some general claims about the bad spiritual and moral effects of pork, Liu Zhi resorted to warnings, drawn from Chinese sources, about threats to physical health. Finally, however, in a rhetorical exchange between himself and an interlocutor, he addressed the criticism that his reliance upon medical texts reflects the views of only one school of thought. He responded to this charge by returning to a meta-physical discussion, invoking the concept of the universal Principle that informs all schools. He lamented, however, that other teachings in China have failed to articulate satisfactorily theories about diet and that in support of Islamic rules on the subject, he had no choice but to cite medical texts.

In a subsequent section on the Islamic prohibition against drinking alcohol, Liu Zhi began his commentary by invoking the moral lessons of the Hadīth, which refer to alcohol as the “mother of all evils” (*umm al-khabā'ith*).¹⁵² In contrast to his commentary on the prohibition of pork, in this section Liu Zhi focused much more on the moral consequences of drinking. He did include one reference to a medical text, the *Bencao beiyao shiji* (Complete Essential Pharmacopoeia on Foods to Avoid), which says, “Excessive drinking of alcohol injures the spiritual vitality, consumes the blood, damages the stomach, dissolves the essence, arouses internal heat and phlegm, inflames rage and passion, and gives rise to various damp and hot illnesses.”¹⁵³

However, the preponderance of evidence cited by Liu Zhi comes from classical and historical Chinese sources that enumerate the moral failures of various ancient rulers who lost their power as a result of their debauchery. Summarizing the collected quotations he had cited, he wrote:

As I refer to the *Zhou History's* injunction on wine and various Confucians' collected discourses and observations about it, it becomes clear just how profound the misfortunes associated with alcohol are. Moreover, as the medical experts speak in detail about [it] . . . it is clear that alcohol has no benefit at all. And as Master Dong has said, the ancients made wine originally to offer as sacrifice, not as something to serve to one's parents or at joyous celebrations. However, later it was used in carousing, resulting in loss of everything from one's virtue to one's country, so that it should be forbidden to drink alcohol altogether. The benefit of such a prohibition is clear.¹⁵⁴

Emphasizing universal moral themes, Liu Zhi argued that the ancient Chinese were well aware of the dangers of alcohol, and although they never outlawed it completely, their sages definitely encouraged temperance:

The ancient sages' teachings never fully outlawed drinking, yet people really could not be trusted to be cautious by themselves and consider alcohol to be a form of pollution. Later, people could not prevent themselves from indulging in it, and in the end could not avoid its turmoil and destruction, because they did not realize that alcohol is such an unvirtuous thing.¹⁵⁵

Finally, Liu Zhi likened Chinese sages' positions on alcohol to that of the Prophet Muḥammad, who, following successive revelations over a span of time, incrementally outlawed it, first forbidding drunkenness during prayer¹⁵⁶ before finally commanding complete abstinence. Thus he once again equated the core morality of the Confucian and Islamic traditions, enabling him to use classical Chinese sources to justify an essential Islamic rule of conduct.

In the final two *juan* of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi addressed marriage and death and the rites and observances surrounding these important events in the life cycle. Watson has singled out marriage and funerary rites as being among the most important factors in demonstrating an individual's, or a community's, participation in the unified culture of China. He has argued that "Chineseness" is confirmed by one's observance of certain rites and, moreover, by understanding and accepting "the view, that there is a correct way to perform rites associated with the life cycle, namely, the rites of birth, marriage, death, and ancestorhood."¹⁵⁷ Building upon Watson's theory, including his acknowledgment that ethnic and cultural diversity is possible under the umbrella of a unified Chinese culture, I have advocated an expanded definition of "Chineseness." Recognition of and reverence for the *concept* of ritual by an ethno-religious community in China could also act as a guarantor of membership in the unified culture, notwithstanding specific differences in practice and custom. In this way, Chinese Muslims who adopted certain Chinese customs and shared many Chinese mores, while maintaining the core praxis of Islam, have effected their special Chinese-Islamic simultaneity.

By addressing the crucial rites associated with marriage and death as he did, Liu Zhi demonstrated an appreciation of the importance of ritual in general, and weddings and funerals in particular. Thus, Liu Zhi and those of his ilk were active and conscious participants in the greater Chinese culture, even as they affirmed their allegiance to Islam, allowing Chinese Muslims to operate as a subculture in central and eastern China. In this context, Liu Zhi acknowledged and even tolerated a certain amount of interpolation of local Han customs into the practices of

Muslims living in China. As he wrote in specific reference to marriage practices among Chinese Muslims:

With respect to the affairs of matrimony, the customs of each region are particular to that region. . . . Naturally, we Muslims, having been born in this land, cannot be completely different in our customs from the local people. Yet only those customs that we can follow do we follow. As for those that we cannot follow, we are nevertheless obliged to comply with ritual in our practice.¹⁵⁸

Thus, Liu Zhi paid the proper reverence to the concept of ritual, retaining for Muslims and Islam a place within the pale of Chinese culture and society.

Liu Zhi justified the assimilation of various Chinese manners, insofar as they did not violate beliefs or practices sacrosanct to Islam. When we look at his chapters on the rites associated with marriage and death, we find for the most part adherence to religious practice and custom found throughout the Islamic world. Among the marriage customs, however, there are a few peculiarities that are not traditional in Islam and are likely accretions coming from local Chinese practices. These include ceremonies in which the head of the prospective groom's family pays a visit to the family of the prospective bride formally to thank them for their consent to the marriage proposal and, on the following day, a reciprocal visit by the bride's family to the groom's home. These practices are not required by the *shari'a*, nor are they even part of the customary practices of most Muslim societies. But they represent a spirit of congeniality consistent with Islamic values and are therefore permissible in Liu Zhi's opinion.

Liu Zhi's acceptance of certain aspects of local custom is not unique and has ample precedent in the history of Islam. Observers have often remarked about Islam's ability to assimilate elements of local, often pre-Islamic, cultures wherever it has spread. As Peter Awn describes the phenomenon of cultural diversity in the greater Islamic world, "the Islamic world view has taken root in a variety of cultural settings" and

While there may be a common vision that can be abstracted from these cultural settings and labeled "Islamic," the multifaceted and evolving historical forms of Islamic civilization are the realities we encounter. Moreover, the unity of the Islamic *umma* is based primarily on the ideals embedded in this abstract vision, not on any serious hope to impose cultural uniformity.¹⁵⁹

In tolerating Chinese customs not proper to the Sunna of Muḥammad, in the

Tianfang dianli Liu Zhi did not violate Islamic norms. Rather, his opinions were consistent with the oldest and best traditions of Islam, namely, its embrace of cultural diversity, unified, as it were, by a set of basic, common values inspired by the faith. The Islamic *umma*, as a community of faith, is held together in part because of its Qur'ānic basis and by the figure of the Prophet, manifested in the Sunna. Yet apart from this textual integrity, the *umma* could not remain monolithic or homogeneous after its establishment once it began to expand and take root in cultures outside of Arabia. A multicultural Islam could not be expected to maintain doctrinal homogeneity any more than could transnational Judaism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, or Buddhism, among the world's great traditions.

Looking to Persia as an example, we see a nation conquered early in the Islamic period, but which had a rich pre-Islamic culture sufficiently different from that of the Arabs that its version of Islam is substantially different from the Arabian tradition. Clifford Geertz's extensive comparison of the Islamic cultures of Morocco and Indonesia, geographical bookends of the Muslim world, highlights this diversity and variable evolution.¹⁶⁰ Both countries are indisputably Islamic and both have a strong Sufi cultural undercurrent, but apart from an "abstract vision" of Islamic unity, based on a set of core beliefs and practices, they are profoundly different cultures. Chinese Islam constitutes a powerful and fascinating case study in the analysis of Islamic diversity and unity, for its base culture was never Islamicized, and yet through its long history millions of people have managed their Chinese-Muslim simultaneity without obvious schizophrenia. This negotiation of dual identity and heritage was epitomized by Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb scholars, who borrowed from the dominant local civilization to create a uniquely Chinese vision of Islam.

CHAPTER 6

ALLAH'S CHINESE NAME

The *Tianfang dianli* is arguably the most syncretic of Liu Zhi's writings. Because it was the only Han Kitāb book dedicated to ritual law, Liu Zhi found in its subject matter a theme especially conducive to his aim of presenting Islam as a Teaching consistent with the fundamental values of Confucian culture and ideology. By focusing as he did on Islamic rites and customs, he was able to demonstrate that Muslims share the Chinese understanding of ritual as one of the guiding principles of human life. Ritual, then, was the perfect vehicle for the harmonization of Confucian and Islamic ideals, as Liu Zhi expressed clearly in his preface:

If one gains an understanding by drawing parallels and citing examples, then what is bright and subtle will find its proof. Although these principles are expressed in Islamic writings, they are actually no different from what is found in the Confucian canon. Observance of the ritual of Islam is tantamount to observance of the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages and kings.¹

Describing his methodology as “drawing parallels and citing examples,” Liu Zhi echoed the practice of “matching concepts” (*geyi*) that had fueled the first several centuries of Buddhism's transplantation and naturalization in China. Like the early Chinese Buddhist translators, Liu Zhi sought accommodation with the dominant culture by identifying concepts he could equate with those of his Islamic faith. He also sought evidence in the classical Chinese texts of

concepts that resembled articles of Islamic faith closely enough that he could argue a common divine origin, as well as the accordance of ancient Chinese beliefs with those of Islam. This approach was not Liu Zhi's original invention. Some of his Han Kitāb predecessors had already begun this process in the Chinese Islamic context, and other foreign religious communities in China had been pursuing similar courses for centuries. Buddhist, Nestorian, Jewish, Jesuit, and Chinese Catholic writers, among others, had all tried their hand at using the classical Chinese idiom to convey the principles and ideals of their traditions before Liu Zhi.

Central to the accommodation efforts of members of these foreign religio-philosophical communities were the challenges of translation, both literal and cultural. In some cases, translation achieved by "matching concepts" was quite direct and simple. All the major religio-philosophical traditions in China therefore used a common vocabulary to refer to basic concepts, including *dao* (the Way), *jiao* (Teaching), *li* (ritual), *fa* (law), *sheng* (sage), *jing* (classic/scripture), etc. We have examined in some detail how Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb writers used these terms. For example, we saw how the concepts of *dao* and *jiao* were co-opted as bywords for Islam, the former to present Islam as a manifestation of the universal Way, and the latter to discuss its aspects as a specific Teaching. We have also seen his use of the concept of *sheng*, whereby Muḥammad and the other prophets of the Islamic tradition were equated with Confucius and the ancient Chinese sages. Liu Zhi used these concepts to great effect and presented many key Islamic beliefs as completely concordant with central themes of Confucian thought. For example, his use of the term *li*, or ritual, to describe not only the physical practice of rites and ceremonies but also the sense of propriety and pious comportment that is to govern all human activity, was particularly effective. The facility with which he transposed these concepts made the *Tianfang dianli* most accessible to Confucian readers.

"Matching concepts" was an important method employed by Liu Zhi, but it was not the only one. There were ideas, or figures, that defied matching and for which there was no obvious corresponding Chinese term. In cases where a foreign word had no existing Chinese equivalent, there were only two options available: transliteration or coinage. Liu Zhi used both of these. He described his reasoning behind the use of transliteration as follows:

This book is made up of Islamic sayings and references, but uses Chinese to translate and transliterate them. Among these are some things that one can translate and others that one cannot translate. As for relating matters and explaining principles, these may be translated. However, names of people and places cannot be translated. For example, the names in the section on the various sages of Islam, or the

names of mountains and cities in the section on the pilgrimage—these are all untranslatable.²

He further explained that, apart from the transliteration of proper nouns, there were also instances where an Arabic or Persian technical term had to be rendered in Chinese. He described these as words whose “meanings cannot be completely translated.”³ In such cases, he would transliterate the term using Chinese characters that approximate its pronunciation, and then also provide a literal translation into Chinese. He cited as an example the Arabic word for “believer,” *mu'min*, which he transliterated as *mumin* and translated sometimes as “gentleman” (*junzi*), sometimes as “believer” (*xinshi*), and sometimes as “follower” (*shunzhe*), saying that “none of these translations departs from the real meaning of *mu'min*.”⁴

There were other terms for which no “matching concept” would do, but for which Liu Zhi likely felt that a transliteration would have been awkward or would not have done justice to the original meaning in Arabic. The most poignant example of such a term was none other than the name of the Islamic deity, Allah. Other Chinese Muslim writers, both before and since Liu Zhi's time, have approached the challenge of divine nomenclature by using the traditional method of transliteration, rendering *Allāh* as *Anla*, for example.⁵ At first glance, one might think that transliteration was the only way to overcome the obstacle of rendering Allah in Chinese since Muslims commonly regard this proper name of God as sacrosanct and ultimately untranslatable. However, the absence of an alphabet or syllabary in Chinese necessitates the use of characters that are simultaneously phonemes and logograms. Thus it is impossible to transliterate a foreign word using Chinese characters without the meaning of those characters coming through in the transliteration.

Likely wishing to avoid attaching any possible negative or misleading implication to the sacred name of God, Liu Zhi did not resort to transliteration of the Arabic *Allāh*. Neither did he attempt to find a “matching concept” for Allah in the classical Chinese canon, for example, one of the ancient Chinese designations for divinity, such as Shangdi, *tian* (“Heaven”), or the more generic *shen* (“god”). We have seen how Liu Zhi addressed some of these terms and his reasons for not using them as one to one translations of *Allāh*. Instead of “matching concepts” or transliteration, he opted to use newly coined Chinese terms for the most central concept of the Islamic faith, and in the process, whether consciously or unconsciously, he retraced the steps of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writers in Chinese before him. The way Liu Zhi approached the search for Allah's Chinese name thus places him once again in the historical context of the obstacles faced by all monotheists in China, and it is a fascinating subtext of the *Tianfang dianli*.

THE CONTEXT AND SUBTEXT OF LIU ZHI'S SEARCH FOR DIVINE NOMENCLATURE

Not far into the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*, Liu Zhi characterized “reverent service” as the centerpiece of the faith.⁶ From this, a logical question arises: reverent service to whom? The answer to this implicit question may not have been obvious to a non-Muslim (or at least nonmonotheistic) audience. Yet there is no doubt what Liu Zhi had in mind. In his commentary on “reverent service,” he mentioned the virtues of serving one’s ruler and parents, values familiar and dear to his Confucian readers, but he also made it quite clear that he saw these as being components of a greater call to service, namely, “submitting to the Lord and Master.”⁷

In the second chapter, Liu Zhi discussed abstract metaphysical theories about the nature of God and creation, thereby establishing the “identity” of Allah. Focusing as it does on the Islamic notion of *tawhīd*, or Divine Unity, the chapter frequently refers to “the one,” which, in the context of the discussion, is clearly a designation for God as well. The third chapter of the *Tianfang dianli* is where Liu Zhi argued the epistemological necessity of God’s existence and established the valid sources of knowledge concerning God. It is also where he discussed in the most concrete terms how to recognize what God is not. Citing examples from other major religio-philosophical traditions in China and abroad, by a process of elimination he rejected various names and descriptions of divinity. Thus he approached the search for a suitable appellation for Allah in Chinese, writing: “All scholars who desire an exact recognition of the True Lord must first distinguish His title before seeking His essence.”⁸

In the Islamic tradition, Allah is considered to be the personal name of the creator. Many Muslims maintain that this Arabic proper noun defies all attempts at definition or translation,⁹ and therefore, in all Muslim cultures, whether Arabic-speaking or not, the name Allah is universally understood as inviolable. Nevertheless, there is ample precedent within the tradition for referring to Allah by numerous other appellations and epithets. The Qur’ān itself proclaims that one may call “Him Allah or call Him *al-Raḥmān* (The Merciful); whatever you call Him, to Him belong the most beautiful of names.”¹⁰ Thus Islam acknowledges that Allah is not limited by or to His name, and this understanding gives Muslims license to approach the divine in terms that are comprehensible to them. So Muslims may call God whatever they will, with the sole proviso that the name be “beautiful,” which may be interpreted to mean that it is befitting of His holiness and majesty.

Under these circumstances, it is not unusual to find non-Arab Muslims using terms for God derived from their own languages and cultures, in addition to the

name Allah. Perhaps the most common and established example of this occurs in the Farsi-speaking world and those cultures influenced by Persian culture. Persian has functioned for centuries as the second language of Islam in the regions of the Islamic world adjacent to Iran, especially in Central and South Asia. Thus, in Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, to mention but a few, Muslims frequently refer to God using the Persian word *khudā*, as in the farewell salutation “*khudā hāfiẓ*” (“may God preserve you”). This sort of substitution of a word in the local dialect for Allah occurs wherever a pre-Islamic culture had an existing corresponding notion of divinity. Thus in certain expressions Turks sometimes still use the ancient Altaic word *Tanrı* in place of *Allāh*, while Muslims in the West refer to Allah as *Dieu*, *Dios*, *Gott*, etc., as in English, where the word “God” is generally used both colloquially and in formal translations.

NAMING THE NUMEN IN CLASSICAL CHINESE

This system of finding equivalents for the Islamic concept of divinity, akin to the method of “matching concepts” in Chinese religio-philosophical discourse, is only effective where such equivalents exist. The problem in the Chinese context, as scholars have pointed out, is that there is no real equivalent for “Allah.” This is not to say that Chinese religion and philosophy lack ideas of divinity and of ultimate reality; to the contrary, classical Chinese metaphysical discourse is replete with terms for these. But there is no single term, like *khudā* or “God,” to which monotheists trying to express their theology in Chinese could turn. Thus, as Raphael Israeli observes, “there has hardly been a conclusively and universally accepted rendering of the monotheistic God” in Chinese.¹¹

Jewish, Christian, and Muslim writers trying to present their theology in classical Chinese experimented with various expressions.¹² Their choices sometimes reflected the religio-philosophical trends of a given period, so that during the Tang dynasty, when Buddhism was ascendant, Nestorian writers sometimes used the character *fó*, meaning “Buddha,” to represent the Christian God. Han Chinese observers have likewise referred to the Muslims’ God as *fó*.¹³ As unlikely as it may seem, according to Kodo Tazaka, Muslims themselves actually used this term to refer to Allah into the Song period.¹⁴ In other early Chinese Muslim usage, *tian* (“Heaven”) was used, though this practice was discontinued by the time the Han *Kitāb* corpus began to develop, and Liu Zhi explicitly rejected the term because of its connotations in Chinese popular religious parlance. Muslims, like their Jewish and Christian counterparts, also experimented with the name of the ancient Chinese deity Shangdi as an equivalent for Allah, but this usage never gained widespread acceptance either. Liu Zhi commented on the suitability of the term in the context of Islamic theology in the *Tianfang dianli*, as we shall see. Liu

Zhi also used a term taken from the Daoist canon, specifically from Zhuangzi, to refer to the supreme deity and ultimate reality: *zhenzai*, the “True Master.”¹⁵ However, this term is used in an abstract sense in the *Zhuangzi*, and doesn’t capture the sense of personal deity required in Islamic theological contexts.¹⁶

The imperative to find a Chinese name for Allah drove Muslim writers to embrace a term that has never held currency in the language of Chinese religio-philosophical discourse, but which has been used extensively by monotheists in China, namely *zhu*, or “lord.” Israeli argues that Muslims opted for this term precisely because it is not frequently used in Chinese religion and as a means of “differentiation from the Chinese religious terms (Buddhist and Daoist) lest the Believers, or the uninformed non-believers, might find too much of a terminological rapprochement between them and Islam.”¹⁷ This may be part of the reason for the usage. However, the fact that Nestorians had already established this as a term suitable for monotheistic theology in the stele inscription of 781, followed later by the Jesuit coinage of the title *tianzhu*, “Lord of Heaven,” set a precedent for Muslim writers to follow. In fact, one of the terms Liu Zhi used to refer to Allah in the *Tianfang dianli* is a term found in the Nestorian inscription, namely *zhenzhu*, the “True Lord.”

The fact that *zhu* was rarely used in Chinese religio-philosophical discourse certainly freed it from any connotations that were contrary to monotheistic principles. The term suited Liu Zhi’s sensibilities because it was not overly abstract. Rather, it conveyed a personal sense of dominion. Yet, anticipating questions about the anthropomorphic connotations of the term “lord,” Liu Zhi devoted a passage to explaining the meaning and derivation of the term as a title of respect originally used to refer to the head of a family or feudal potentates. He further stated that this title has been borrowed by Muslims to refer to Allah metaphorically, such metaphors being useful to illustrate the otherwise ineffable nature of God:

His significance cannot be contained by any name or title, but because He resembles the master of a household or lord of a country, He is addressed by the title “Lord.” In the case of the Lord, one borrows the title in order to designate this principle. . . . That is, taking something that has a form to represent something formless.¹⁸

Liu Zhi also warned against taking the metaphor literally and equating Allah with a mortal. He explained that in order to prevent such a misapprehension, “[f]requently, the word ‘real’ or ‘true’ is added as a prefix. We say ‘True Lord’ because there is more than one circumstance under which something is called ‘lord.’ . . . Universal, eternal and immutable, this is none other than the True Lord.”¹⁹

Thus, Liu Zhi also accounted for the frequent appearance of the word

zhen (“true” or “real”) in Chinese Muslim theological discourse. This word appears frequently in Daoist and Buddhist writings, where it connotes truth in an epistemological sense, as well as genuineness, legitimacy, and, significantly, metaphysical reality. As such, it corresponds well to the Arabic word *haqq*, which similarly signifies both truth and reality. In its specific theological usage in Islam, *al-Haqq*, “the Real,” is also one of the ninety-nine names of Allah, so it is fitting that the equivalent Chinese word *zhen* should have been used by Liu Zhi and other Han Kitāb writers to refer to God. He also used the word *zhen* as a prefix in other compounds to designate Allah, including *zhenyi*, the “True One,” and *zhenzai*, the “True Master.”

Liu Zhi was not altogether consistent in his use and application of the various names he coined or borrowed for Allah, but there do seem to be some implicit patterns in his usage. When referring to God in the context of Chinese cosmology and metaphysics, the text generally prefers the term that comes from the Chinese religio-philosophical tradition (via Zhuangzi): *zhenzai*. In passages that are clearly translations of Islamic theological formulations or Qur’ānic exegesis, Liu Zhi opted for the neologism *zhenzhu* (or simply *zhu*). He also used this term whenever he discussed Allah in a comparative context with implicit or explicit reference to other traditions, especially Christianity. In other instances, he simply combined these two in the term *Zhuzai*, “Lord and Master,” showing Allah to be universal in His dominion.

LIU ZHI’S SEARCH FOR MONOTHEISTIC ANTECEDENTS IN THE CHINESE TRADITION

Liu Zhi’s attempt to define Islamic theology comparatively by surveying “all other theologies current in (his) own cultural context”²⁰ is yet another indication of the fact that “Chinese Muslim scholarship was invariably produced in an ongoing conversation with earlier works and ideas.”²¹ By engaging in this sort of comparative discourse, Liu Zhi showed himself to be a full-fledged participant in Chinese literati culture. He also saw it as an opportunity and a method to distinguish Islam from various rival teachings and assert its orthodoxy and its superiority over those traditions deemed heterodox by the Confucian mainstream, especially Daoism and Buddhism. Thus, for example, in the *Tianfang xingli*, Liu Zhi made “a comparison between the Daoist concept of *wu* (‘non-being’), the Buddhist concept of *kong* (‘emptiness’) and the Chinese Islamic concept of *zhenyi* (the ‘True and One’).”²²

In the *Tianfang dianli*, he continued this approach, for example contrasting Islamic notions of Allah’s oneness and complete independence with the Christian doctrines of the Trinity and divine incarnation. He also rebuked the deification of

Laozi and the Buddha and rejected the use of “Heaven” and “Principle” in popular religion and Neo-Confucianism respectively as suitable designations for God. Ironically, the traditions whose doctrines Liu Zhi so severely critiqued were also among the historical precedents from which he drew inspiration for his theological formulations. On the other hand, it is quite natural for a thinker to borrow from those who preceded him and to correct what he perceived to be errors in their approach or conclusions, and this is precisely what Liu Zhi did.

Liu Zhi co-opted terminology and concepts from the Three Teachings of China—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism—even as he was sometimes critical of some of their doctrines, particularly those of the latter two “heterodoxies.” How could he have avoided borrowing from, or at least using the vocabulary of, the Three Teachings, which in their writings embodied all of the most creative, and familiar, Chinese conceptions and expressions of ultimate reality? One of the names by which he referred to Allah, *zhenzai*, the “True Master,” comes directly from a Daoist text. To support his theological claims by demonstrating that the ancient Chinese sages believed in God, Liu Zhi also quoted extensively from the Confucian canon, including passages from the *Shujing*, *Shijing*, *Chunqiu*, and *Yijing*, all referring to the ancient Chinese deity Shangdi.

Liu Zhi clearly identified Shangdi with Allah: “When the *Shijing* and *Shujing* speak of the Shangdi it is just as our own Islam speaks of the Lord and Master.”²³ He also recognized that the ancient Chinese sages sometimes referred to the supreme being as “Heaven,” and although they did not speak in great detail about their theology, they certainly were not worshipping the physical sky. Thus, Liu Zhi suggested that the ancient Chinese recognized and revered the one true God, but that later generations gradually lost that pure, monotheistic understanding of divinity. According to this theory of history, Chinese civilization had suffered a theological degradation. On the one hand, the masses came to worship all sorts of false gods and deified mortal beings, while on the other hand scholars became obsessed with overly abstract notions of transcendence, which left no room for the worship of a personal deity. Even worse, from Liu Zhi’s perspective, heterodox sects like Daoism and Buddhism regarded that ultimate reality as “nothingness” or “emptiness” and opined that there was no creator as such. For Liu Zhi, all of these extremes violated the most basic tenets of his faith.

Liu Zhi’s theory of the degeneration of monotheism in China is the same type of argument made by Western Muslim scholars in their confrontations with other religions. It is, in fact, a tradition that goes back to the Qur’ān itself. As the tradition maintains, since the time of Adam, the pure monotheism of divinely revealed religion, “primordial Islam,” has gone through repeated cycles of decline, only to be renewed each time God sent a prophet to the world to bear His message of truth. Thus, just “as the *‘ulama* accused Christians and Jews of having distorted

the true creeds of the Bible and Torah,” the Han Kitāb scholars “also assailed the Confucians of later generations for deviating from the original Confucian teaching on Heaven” under the pernicious influence of Daoism and Buddhism.²⁴ It is because the terms *tian* and Shangdi had come to be associated with Chinese pagan traditions that Liu Zhi eschewed their use in reference to Allah. He claimed that the ancient Chinese sages believed in the one true God and knew him as Shangdi. Furthermore, he acknowledged that “in the Five Classics the Confucians sometimes called Shangdi ‘Heaven.’”²⁵ However, in Liu Zhi’s opinion, this ancient truth had been corrupted and China had consequently become a country without a purely monotheistic conception of divinity. Hence these classical terms whereby the righteous ancients knew God were no longer suitable names for Allah in Chinese.

JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES ON LIU ZHI

Besides reflecting a traditional Islamic religious history, Liu Zhi’s theory of the primordial monotheism of ancient China closely resembles the Jesuit theory of primitive Confucianism as a manifestation of “natural religion.” Initiating this discourse, “Ricci had argued that the use of *Shang-ti* in the ancient Chinese Classics was close to the Christian sense of God.”²⁶ In Ricci’s own words, “From the very beginning of their history it is recorded in their writings that they recognized and worshipped one supreme being whom they called the King of Heaven, or designated by some other name indicating his rule over heaven and earth.”²⁷ As attractive as the terms Shangdi or *tian* might have been to Ricci and the early Jesuits in their hope of building conceptual bridges to the Chinese tradition, in the end they decided it was necessary to come up with a different name for God in Chinese Christian literature. For one thing, their theory of “natural religion” notwithstanding, the Jesuits were also committed to representing Christianity as a “special, divine revelation.”²⁸ It was therefore necessary to devise a designation for the Christian God that sufficiently distinguished Christian doctrine from other teachings.

Ricci liked the term Shangdi and used it a number of times in the *Tianzhu shiyi*. However, it was feared that exclusive use of it as interchangeable with the Christian God “might have led to the mere equation of Christianity with Confucianism, or worse still, with popular Taoism where the term . . . had been taken over as a name for a popular deity.”²⁹ Similarly, the term *tian* “was attractive since it was in wide use as a term equivalent to Heaven as this was sometimes used in the West.”³⁰ However, its use “would have opened the way to a degree of imprecision regarding the personal nature of God which the missionaries could not tolerate.”³¹ This was essentially the same argument Liu Zhi had put forth for

avoiding *tian* as a name for Allah in the *Tianfang dianli*. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu point out that in Japan, where the Jesuits faced a similar dilemma with this terminology, they originally opted for a transliteration of the Latin *deus*.³² In China, by contrast, the Jesuits coined an innovative name for the Christian God when a Chinese convert, upon seeing a Christian icon, “saluted the painting of Christ with the title ‘Lord of Heaven,’” *tianzhu*.³³ This name, which preserved a link to the classical Chinese notion of *tian* but posited a deity who was superior to and presided over Heaven, quickly took root as the official term for God among Catholics in China, who still use it today. Brandishing the newly coined term *tianzhu*, the Jesuit missionaries, and later Chinese Christian apologists, were successful in establishing a distinct identity for their religion and their God in Chinese discourse. Plenty of Chinese at the time may not have agreed with the Christian message, and many actively opposed the spread of Christianity, but one thing was certain: virtually every educated person in late Ming–early Qing China had heard the name of the religion, Tianzhujiao and, by extension, knew its deity as the “Lord of Heaven.”

The Chinese Muslim scholars of the Han Kitāb were probably also aware of the fame, or notoriety, of Christianity in China and may have been influenced by it to seek a “brand name” of equal status for their Islamic conception of God. We know that the erudite Liu Zhi, living in cosmopolitan Nanjing, where the Jesuits had made extensive inroads, had read “Occidental books,” and as most scholars agree, this probably meant that he had read Jesuit translations of European literature and/or Christian texts in Chinese.³⁴ It is likely that he was influenced by their methodology, even imitating aspects of it. However, he and other Han Kitāb writers were also conscious of the need to distinguish their presentation of Islam and Allah from the Christians’ presentation of their faith and their conception of God.³⁵

Jin addresses speculation that Liu Zhi received direct influence from Jewish or Christian sources and is of the opinion that this is “definitely a possibility.”³⁶ Yet Liu Zhi’s writings show almost no trace of direct Jewish influence. The only explicit reference to Judaism in the *Tianfang dianli* comes in the context of a discussion of Islamic dietary regulations. Explaining Muslim practices of ritual slaughter, Liu Zhi points out that only the meat of a lawful animal, properly slaughtered by invoking the name of God, may be eaten. He further explained the Qur’ānic provision that the food of the people of the book is lawful to Muslims,³⁷ provided they prepare it by invoking God’s name and not the name of a deified human being:

If the Europeans [i.e., Christians] or the Jews understand the need to invoke the name of the Lord when slaughtering, it is permitted to eat

the meat they have prepared. If the name of Yesu [i.e., Jesus] or Musa [i.e., Moses] is invoked in the slaughtering, it is forbidden to eat such meat.³⁸

This passage does not suggest direct Jewish influence, but rather that Liu Zhi may have acquired his knowledge about Judaism from some other Chinese, Christian, or Islamic source. Supporting this supposition, the term he used to refer to Jews, Zhuhudi, is not found in any of the known Chinese Jewish writings, where the Jews called themselves Yicileye, a transliteration of “Israel.”³⁹ The term Liu Zhi used resembles the “earliest names given to the Jews during the Mongol period . . . derived from the New Persian *Djuhud* or *Djahud*” and carried over in a number of variant transliterations into official Ming dynasty sources.⁴⁰ Liu Zhi likely adopted this from an earlier Chinese writing, or perhaps from a Persian text he had read.⁴¹ He also picked up somewhere the mistaken belief that Jews regard Moses in a way similar to the Christian worship of Jesus. We cannot know whence Liu Zhi acquired this faulty knowledge. It certainly did not come from any Chinese Jewish text, nor from firsthand knowledge of Jewish ritual practice, and it seems unlikely that Liu Zhi ever read the Kaifeng stele, directly or copied, or that he knew anything about Judaism directly from the indigenous Jewish community. Rather, he could have acquired some of his information from the references to Jews and Judaism in the Chinese Catholic writings and some from Muslim writings, both in Chinese and Islamic languages. A clue to the possible origin of this misapprehension concerning Jewish ritual is Liu Zhi’s transliteration of Moses’ name. Chinese Jewish writings generally render the name either as Mieshe or Moshe.⁴² Liu Zhi used the standard Chinese Muslim transliteration Musa from the Arabic Mūsā, strengthening speculation that his misinformation came originally from an Islamic source.

By contrast, the transliteration of the name of Jesus that Liu Zhi used in the passage above strongly supports the supposition that Liu Zhi had read Catholic literature in Chinese. Yesu is a transliteration of the Latin pronunciation of Jesus, originally used by the Jesuits in China. On other occasions, when referring to Jesus as a prophet of Islam, Liu Zhi used the transliteration preferred by Chinese Muslims, Ersā, from the Arabic *Īsā*. This usage, combined with his reference to Christians as Ouruobaren, or “European people,” supports the hypothesis that Liu Zhi was referring to the Jesuits and was acquainted with their writings.

Another subtle hint of Liu Zhi’s familiarity with Jesuit discourse in Chinese occurs in his brief discussion of the term “lord” (*zhu*) in the third chapter of the *Tianfang dianli*. After his main text and commentary, and before the collected quotations and notes that end the chapter, Liu Zhi inserted a section under the heading *Shiyi*, the “True Meaning.” Nowhere else does this phrase occur in the

Tianfang dianli, and I believe it is extremely significant that Liu Zhi used it specifically in his discussion of suitable divine nomenclature. Perhaps the most famous use of the term *shiyi* in Chinese literature is in the title of Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*, a work that presents the essential tenets of Christian faith in a style intended for Confucian readers. Ricci coined the term especially for this work, which was written to replace an earlier Chinese catechism by Michele Ruggieri, called the *True Record of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu shilu)*.⁴³ Both Ruggieri's and Ricci's books were among the earliest to use the newly coined name for the Christian God, Tianzhu. The *Tianzhu shiyi* was particularly widely circulated and became an extremely important tool for Christian missionary work in China and a template for subsequent Chinese Christian discourse. It is no coincidence that Liu Zhi should have chosen to use the term *shiyi*; he was likely alluding to Ricci's famous text and intended to build upon the Jesuit discourse on monotheism in Chinese. Of course, by co-opting Ricci's terminology, he also intimated that his own Chinese Islamic theology eclipsed and supplanted its Christian predecessor.

Liu Zhi engaged Christian doctrine even more directly in his exegesis of the 112th *sūra* of the Qur'ān, which explicitly rejects the idea that God has either begotten offspring or that He was ever begotten by another. This rejection could apply to any religious tradition that espouses a belief in divine incarnation, but the most obvious target of the verse is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. And while Liu Zhi's exegesis does not mention Christianity by name, its rebuke is clearly implied:

When a woman gives birth to a child, it is called "begetting." And when lower creatures reproduce themselves, this is also called "begetting." The True Lord does not fall into such categories. He does not have anywhere from which to be born. Therefore, He is unbegotten. Also, there is nothing He begets. The meaning of this verse is contrary to the absurd claims of the heterodox sect, who say that the True Lord has a son, that He was begotten, and also that He is a father, who has begotten.⁴⁴

A clue that Liu Zhi intended to take on the Christian doctrine of divine incarnation and, more specifically, to confront Jesuit teachings is evident in the subtle shift in his terminology. In the opening lines of the first chapter of the *Tianfang dianli* Liu Zhi referred to God in his solitude, before creation, as the "One True Master" (*yi zhenzai*),⁴⁵ a term whose *locus classicus*, as we have seen, is in the *Zhuangzi*. The title of the second chapter, in which the exegesis of the Qur'ānic verse appears, is *zhenzai*, the "True Master." In this exegetical passage, however, Liu Zhi employed the slightly different, albeit virtually synonymous term

zhenzhu, the “True Lord,” which, as we shall see below, may be traced back to a Tang period Nestorian Christian inscription in Chinese. Substituting *zhu* (lord) for *zai* (master) was likely an allusion to the Chinese term coined by Catholic writers for the Christian God, *Tianzhu*, which shares the character *zhu*. Once again, we can interpret this as Liu Zhi’s subtle way of co-opting the Jesuits’ terminology for monotheism in Chinese while at the same time expressing Islam’s superiority over Christianity; while the Christians may call their deity the “Lord of Heaven,” only Muslims properly recognize the “True Lord.”

Considering the commonalities of the three Abrahamic traditions, we should not be at all surprised to find similarities in the methodologies and terminology of Muslims, Christians, and Jews writing about their faiths in Chinese. Some of these similarities can be attributed to coincidence, that is, to the fact that communities with similar beliefs living in the same foreign cultural context would quite naturally arrive at similar expressions of their doctrines in the local idiom. Indeed, any immigrant minority community undergoes a natural process of acculturation and assimilation, producing a range of common responses and resulting in similar features regardless of time or place. However, apart from historical coincidence and the common goal of accommodation with Confucianism, there is also evidence of mutual influence among intellectuals of the three foreign monotheistic communities in China and, consequently, of cross-pollination of their thought and writing, leading to specific resemblances.

It is interesting to note that (discounting the Nestorian stele) the three Abrahamic communities do not appear to have begun writing about their religious teachings in classical Chinese until the Ming dynasty, with the 1489 Jewish stone inscription at the synagogue in Kaifeng leading the way. So the most important known writings in Chinese by followers of all three monotheistic traditions were produced between the end of the fifteenth through the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. It is also significant that the communities that produced these writings all resided in eastern China, that is, the center of Chinese civilization. The Islamic, Christian, and Jewish writers were all immersed in mainstream Chinese culture and society and, as educated persons, were engaged in the Confucian-dominated intellectual discourse of the day. Given this situation, members of all three communities were certainly aware of each other and each other’s writings.

We know that Ricci had shown curiosity about the Jewish, Nestorian, and Muslim communities in China. Hearing of a Jewish population in the old Song capital of Kaifeng, he sent one of his representatives to seek them out. He reported meeting a Chinese Jew named Ai Tian in 1605 while living in Beijing, whom he questioned about the history of the Chinese Jewish community and whether he had any knowledge of Chinese Christians. Ai Tian had not heard of Christianity *per se*, though he did speak of a Chinese community, originally of foreign origin,

whose members worshipped the figure of the cross, but were practically extinct. Ricci, probably correctly, supposed these to be descendants of the Nestorian community. From this encounter, we know that Ricci had knowledge of the Chinese Jews and had acquired from them some information on Chinese Christians. Ricci was also well aware of the sizeable Muslim population in various parts of China, but the intelligence he gathered about them led him to the conclusion that most were ignorant of their own faith. He was also aware that Muslims had bought many copies of the *Tianzhu shiyi*, and he concluded that due to their own religious ignorance and the fact that he had intentionally avoided discussing the Crucifixion in it,⁴⁶ they thought it to be a book on Islam.

The Jesuits, beginning with Ricci, were fascinated by their monotheistic predecessors in China, and it is clear that they saw them as precedents from which to learn. Ideas and practices that had historically sustained these communities could be emulated by the Catholics in China, while they would try to avoid or correct the errors they observed. For example, Ricci admired the way Muslims had integrated themselves into Chinese officialdom, and he thought that if Christians could do likewise, they would have greater opportunities to establish and spread their faith.⁴⁷ It is possible that Ricci's informants had also described to him the Chinese inscriptions they had seen at the Kaifeng synagogue and that this information had influenced him as he embarked on his own writing enterprise. The earliest of these Jewish inscriptions, dated 1489 and 1512, hardly speak of God, and when they do they use classical Chinese notions such as *dao* ("the Way") and *tian* ("Heaven"), or "august heaven" (*huangtian*),⁴⁸ which is described as the "author and preserver of all things" and links this conception of divinity to the earthly figuration of absolute power in the person of the emperor (Ch. *huangdi*).⁴⁹ Ricci would have found the Jewish writings steeped in the terminology of Confucian morality, but lacking in theological content. As we know, he, like Liu Zhi after him, avoided using "Heaven" as a designation for God due to fears that less sophisticated readers would misinterpret the term and suppose that he advocated worship of the physical sky. Thus, he embraced the newly coined term *tianzhu* to describe a being transcendent above all created things, who presided over Heaven and Earth.

Subsequent generations of Jesuits showed a continued interest in learning what they could from and about the living Chinese Jewish and Muslim communities, as well as whatever could be gleaned about the ancient Nestorian community. The Jesuit Alvaro Semedo (1586–1658) was in fact the first European to examine the Nestorian stele unearthed at Xi'an in 1625, which gave the Jesuits greater insight into the history of Semitic monotheism in China.⁵⁰ From the stele inscription they would have learned about a transplanted community of Christians from the West, who upheld many of the tenets of their own doctrine, including

the Creation, the Fall of Man, the Trinity, and the Incarnation and Ascension of Christ. Although the Nestorians prominently displayed the cross in their artifacts and, as we have seen, were observed by the Chinese to revere it as a symbol, mention of the Crucifixion is conspicuously absent from their writings. Perhaps they encountered the same Chinese revulsion for the Passion that the Jesuits later did and therefore similarly omitted it from their official Chinese texts, just as Ricci had done in the *Tianzhu shiyi*.

The Jesuits would have learned from the stele inscription that the Nestorians called God Aluohe, a transliteration of the Syriac Aloha.⁵¹ The inscription also provides an elaborate statement of Christian theology, which set a precedent for all later Chinese formulations of monotheism:

The eternally True and Solitary One, the First of the First, without beginning, the profoundly Mysterious Void, the Last of the Last, the Sublime Being, the Obscure and Abstruse Axis, who creates and transforms, who excels all Sages in eminence and reverence—Is this not our *Aloha*, the mysterious Individual of the Trinity, the beginningless True Lord?⁵²

Upon reading this earliest known monotheistic document in Chinese, Semedo and his fellow Jesuits would have found confirmation of their own discourse. They would have found that their ancient Christian forebears in China had co-opted the term *zhenzhu*, the “True Lord.” This term includes the word *zhu*, which the Jesuit writers later incorporated into the divine nomenclature of their own coinage, *tianzhu*. *Zhenzhu*, of course, was also later used by the Han Kitāb writers, including Liu Zhi, as a designation for Allah. The text of the Nestorian inscription was available in print from as early as the seventeenth century and was even translated and circulated in Europe. Versions of the original Chinese were certainly available in Nanjing, so it is possible that Liu Zhi could have read it.

That the Jesuits deliberately sought guidance in the historical precedents of Chinese Nestorian, Jewish, and Muslim experience is unquestionable. There is also reason to believe, however, that Jewish and Muslim literati may in turn have been influenced by Jesuit expressions of monotheism in Chinese. As we have noted, the Jewish writings in Chinese before the seventeenth century contain very little in the way of theological formulations. The synagogue inscriptions of 1489 and 1512 are exceedingly Confucian in tone and terminology and refer to the creator and object of Israelite worship as “Heaven” or some modified variation thereof. This situation changed in later writings, beginning in the second half of the seventeenth century. The 1663 inscription, for example, describes how Moses “penetrated in quietness to the very heart of God (*di*).”⁵³ The term the writer used,

di, which literally refers to a ruler, is part of the compound used to refer to the earthly emperor (*huangdi*) and is the same character found in the name of the ancient Chinese supreme deity Shangdi. In one of the smaller tablets found in the Kaifeng synagogue, dated 1658, an inscription reads “august heaven, Shangdi” (*haotian Shangdi*), thus linking the two ancient Chinese designations of the divine in the context of Jewish monotheism.⁵⁴

Another Jewish inscription, dated 1679, refers to the “Lord of the Pure and True Teaching” (*qingzhenjiao zhu*).⁵⁵ The writer of this inscription, Shen Quan, employed the term *zhu* (lord) in a fashion similar to Christian and Muslim usage. He also referred to Judaism as the “Pure and True Teaching,” a name much more commonly associated with Islam by the late seventeenth century, when the inscription was written.⁵⁶ Chinese Jewish use of the term *zhu* was established by the early eighteenth century when Zhao Zuomei referred in a couplet to “bowing in worship to the ever-Living Lord.”⁵⁷ A similar formulation, “the Eternal Living Lord” (*changsheng zhu*), appears in a couplet written by a physician named Ai Yingkui. He was probably the son of Ai Tian, the scholar who met with Ricci in 1605, thus reaffirming the web of connections between the various monotheistic communities in China.⁵⁸

It is interesting to note the changes that occurred in Chinese Jewish writings less than a century after the Jesuits burst onto the Chinese intellectual scene and Ricci met with a scholar of the Kaifeng Jewish community. In his *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci had rejected equation of the term “Heaven” with the Christian God. Within a century of that publication, Jewish scholars, who had previously exclusively used *tian*, also began to move away from that usage and to incorporate new theological nomenclature. The terms they used included the ancient Chinese term Shangdi (or simply *di*), which Ricci had sometimes also used. Chinese Jews also began to employ the word *zhu* (lord) in their writings, a term that had been used by Christians in China since the Nestorians and had then become established in the Catholic name for God, *tianzhu*.

Members of the Kaifeng Jewish community, Jesuit missionaries, and their Chinese associates were in direct contact with one another, giving them occasion to exchange ideas. Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi* enjoyed a wide circulation among the literati class, which included Muslim readers. It is certainly possible that literate Chinese Jews also read this and other Chinese Christian literature. Even by 1605, literate Jews were aware of the reputation of the Jesuits and their monotheism; the Jewish scholar Ai Tian attested to “having read about Ricci in a Chinese book circulating in Kaifeng.”⁵⁹ Some Jewish readers may even have mistaken Christian texts for Jewish ones, since the Jesuits generally avoided mention of the Crucifixion for fear of offending Chinese sensibilities but did mention familiar stories from the Old Testament. Such a misapprehension of the true identity of these Christian

writings is plausible when one recalls that upon meeting Ricci, Ai Tian supposed him to be a foreign Jew, since he was clearly not Chinese, but also not Muslim. While we cannot pinpoint specific instances of direct Christian influence on Chinese Jewish scholarship, there was opportunity for it, and Jewish literati would have been receptive to it as they sought to hone their own presentation of monotheistic principles in Chinese. Jesuit and Chinese Christian literature, which was possibly inspired by earlier Jewish writings, could in turn have influenced the brief explosion of Chinese Jewish inscription writing during the seventeenth century.

Chinese Muslim scholars were influenced by the writings of their Christian counterparts, and it is also possible that influences came from the Chinese Jewish community, though this influence is more difficult to track definitively. There is, however, ample circumstantial evidence to build the case. Chinese Jews and Muslims often lived near each other, in part because both communities tended to inhabit ghetto-like urban enclaves and because they were commonly grouped together in the perception of the Han Chinese majority. This proximity, though not always perfectly amicable, nevertheless led to familiarity between the two groups. And familiarity led to intercommunal and intercultural exchanges: “Manifold relations are shown between the two neighboring Semitic races,” including the exchange of “theological titles . . . through the medium of New Persian, their common language” and the Jewish borrowing of certain Chinese Islamic terminology; common “official and popular appellations, particularly those formed with the compound *Hui-hui*”; the modeling of the Kaifeng synagogue after Chinese mosque architecture; and intermarriage between the two communities.⁶⁰ We should not overlook the significance of the pork taboo common to the two communities, and non-Jewish/non-Muslim reaction to it. These facts likely brought Chinese Jews and Muslims together, based both on the possibility of intermarriage as a means of avoiding contamination by the consumers of “impure” foods, as well as the perceptions imposed on them by outsiders. Loewenthal’s reference to the “official and popular appellations . . . formed with the compound *Hui-hui*” reminds us that many among the local Chinese population of Kaifeng thought the Jews to a subset of the Muslims, distinguished from the others by the different color of their headwear, so that Jews were referred to as *lanmao huihui*, or “blue-capped Muslims.”

Cultural and religious similarities, and common interests in the face of prejudice among the mainstream Chinese society around them, certainly led to a “marriage of convenience” between the Jewish and Muslim communities in Kaifeng. This explains the sort of contact that would have permitted mutual influence of their scholars. New Persian may have been a *lingua franca* linking the two communities during the Yuan and early Ming period, but the rapid acculturation of both Jews and Muslims during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries meant that

by the seventeenth century, Chinese was their common language. This fact accounts for the evidence we find of concurrent experimentation with a range of vocabulary, drawn from the greater Chinese religio-philosophical lexicon, to refer to such patently non-Chinese concepts as the creator of the Torah and Qur'ān.

Ethno-religious communities in China influenced and borrowed from not only the mainstream Chinese culture but also from one another. The scholars of the Han Kitāb, foremost among them Liu Zhi, borrowed heavily from concepts and terminology from diverse sources in Chinese culture in their quest for accommodation of Islam with Confucian civilization. But this was nothing new in the history of foreign communities in China, whether Buddhist, Jewish, Christian, or Muslim, all of whom followed “consistent patterns of adaptation” as they were driven by what Erik Zürcher refers to as “the Chinese cultural imperative.”⁶¹

In tracking the similarities between Chinese Jewish, Christian, and Muslim theology, we should expect to see resemblances between the responses made by representatives of similar faiths to identical cultural, social, and political pressures in late imperial China. When we weigh the textual and circumstantial evidence, however, the chances of theological similarities being purely coincidental seem unlikely. The Han Kitāb writers were aware of the Jesuits and Chinese Catholics and were familiar with their literature. It is possible that Wang Daiyu and other Chinese Muslim literati in Nanjing had begun to hear scuttlebutt about theological disputes involving the Jesuit mission, their Chinese Catholic clients, and the Vatican. These disputes over acceptable Chinese formulations of Christian theology began as early as the 1630s, in response to the syncretism and accommodation of Ricci and his successors, culminating in the early eighteenth century in the Chinese Rites Controversy. This much-publicized debate about orthodoxy and orthopraxy had disastrous consequences for the Society of Jesus in both China and Europe.⁶² Assuming that the Chinese Muslim literati had heard about the growing controversy surrounding the Jesuits through much of the seventeenth century, it has been conjectured that the Han Kitāb writers were motivated “to make their own positions available in Chinese so that they would not be criticized like the Christians.”⁶³ A desire to create distance between Islam and Christianity could account for Liu Zhi’s polemical treatments of Christian notions of divine incarnation and the Trinity in the *Tianfang dianli*. But what of instances where Liu Zhi’s thought seems to overlap ideas found in Chinese Catholic writings?

The most obvious examples of such overlap occur in the ways Liu Zhi referred to Allah in Chinese and the metaphysical and theological reasoning surrounding these choices. For instance, Liu Zhi’s rationale for avoiding the term *tian* (“Heaven”) as a direct translation of Allah mirrors Ricci’s argument in the *Tianzhu shiyi* exactly. Both Ricci and Liu Zhi feared that Chinese readers might mistake the term to mean the physical sky, leading to associations with Chinese

popular religion and a failure to appreciate the absolute transcendence of the monotheistic God. Jesuit influence on Liu Zhi's thought in this case is likely, though it is also possible that both Ricci and Liu Zhi had been influenced by the same Neo-Confucian sources. For example, the Song dynasty scholar Cheng Yi made a definitive distinction between the abstract metaphysical concept of Heaven and the physical phenomenon of the blue sky, a distinction with which both Ricci and Liu Zhi would have been familiar.

Another common metaphysical argument made by both Ricci and Liu Zhi revolves around the use of the Neo-Confucian term *taiji*, the "Supreme Ultimate," as a designation for the highest reality. Ricci argued, based on the Confucian claim that *taiji* is nothing other than *li* (Principle), that Principle is devoid of intelligence and consciousness and thus has no substance. Being insubstantial, it is inferior to the myriad creatures, foremost among them human beings, who do possess substance. Ricci opined that something insubstantial could never by itself produce creatures endowed with intelligence and consciousness because "Principle cannot give what it does not possess."⁶⁴ In Ricci's words, "the way that the Supreme Ultimate is described precludes it from being the source of all things."⁶⁵ Ricci's reason demanded that the prime mover, the source of all substance, must be a being possessing substance. For Ricci, Principle, or the Supreme Ultimate, was merely the agent of creation established by the Creator, the Lord of Heaven, whom he explicitly identified with the ancient Chinese deity Shangdi.

Liu Zhi, whether through a coincidentally parallel line of reasoning based on similar monotheistic principles, or due to the direct influence of Jesuit writings, came to virtually the same conclusion *vis-à-vis* God and the Supreme Ultimate. As he wrote in the *Tianfang dianli*: "The True Master is formless, but His manifestations include the Supreme Ultimate."⁶⁶ Here, Liu Zhi's theories reveal the legacy of earlier Han Kitāb scholarship, particularly recalling the cosmogony of Ma Zhu, who argued that *zhenzhu* (Allah) precedes all other figurations of transcendence, including the *taiji* of the Neo-Confucians. The similarity to Ricci's argument is even more apparent in Liu Zhi's remarks about why Principle cannot be equated with God: "Principle belongs to the abstract meaning that dwells within things, but it cannot by itself become or make anything. To call it the Lord would be a mistake."⁶⁷ After similarly arguing that neither the Supreme Ultimate nor Principle are identical with God, Liu Zhi further echoed Ricci in acknowledging that "the Lord and Master is called *di*."⁶⁸

It is precisely in representing their God as "Creator" that Abrahamic monotheists encountered one of their most difficult obstacles to reconciliation with the greater Chinese religio-philosophical tradition. The Chinese cosmos had evolved naturally, uncreated by a generative deity. So it was not only discovering a name for God, but the deeper issue of persuading a Chinese audience that one was even

necessary that challenged monotheistic apologists. In confronting this challenge, both Ricci and Liu Zhi, as indeed for Jesuit and Chinese Muslim writers in general, needed to avoid the Neo-Confucian metaphysical tendency to portray divinity in overly abstract terms such that the personality of the creator is obscured beyond recognition. On the other hand, they had to avoid the other extreme of portraying God in terms so anthropomorphic that He could be confused with any one of the numerous deities of Chinese popular religion. In an effort to find a middle way between the extremes of quasi-atheistic metaphysical abstraction and pagan materialism, the monotheistic traditions in China came to share a common divine nomenclature. Christians, Muslims, and Jews, in due course, all embraced the term *zhu* (lord) as a word befitting both the immanent personality and transcendent majesty of God. I have noted that Jewish adoption of the term *zhu* to refer to God was a relatively late development in the history of that community and speculated that this may be the result of the widespread use of the term by Christians. Liu Zhi's use of the term, on the other hand, need not be ascribed directly to imitation of the Jesuit usage since other Han Kitāb writers had been using it to refer to Allah for several generations. In any case, the Jesuits were not the first monotheists in China to use the character *zhu* in their writings; as we have seen, the Nestorian inscription of 781 contains the compound *zhenzhu*.

This particular usage notwithstanding, the language and organization of some of Liu Zhi's theological arguments in the *Tianfang dianli* are so close to some of those found in Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* that it is hard to imagine the similarity being purely coincidental. The chronology leaves open a possibility that the earlier Han Kitāb writers had read Catholic writings and that Liu Zhi was also influenced by their readings of this literature, in addition to his own.⁶⁹ Regardless of whether Ricci's influence upon Liu Zhi was direct or indirect, it seems indisputable. For example, in both writers' attempt to distance their portrayal of God from the concepts found in Chinese pagan traditions, we find Ricci and Liu Zhi making an almost identical disavowal of the identity of their God with the Jade Emperor (Yuhuang), a central deity of the Daoist pantheon.⁷⁰ Furthermore, as we have seen above, Liu Zhi cited a number of the Confucian classics for evidence that the ancient Chinese recognized and worshipped the one true God. Ricci, who equated the Chinese deity Shangdi and the Christian Lord of Heaven, cited many of the same exact verses of the *Shijing* and *Shujing*. Now, of course, it is possible that Liu Zhi "reinvented the wheel" on his own and that his research into the Confucian canon led him to the same references. It is also quite possible, however, that he had read Ricci's work and took from it what he thought was most useful and effective for substantiating his monotheistic claims. As Ricci himself remarked about Muslims who were buying his book, "they thought it spoke of God in better fashion than any of the other books in China."⁷¹

Whether Liu Zhi borrowed directly from Jesuit writings or his research simply led him to similar conclusions, the fact remains that in his presentation of theology, he followed in the footsteps of other monotheists in China. However, lest we mistakenly assume that Liu Zhi's ideas were purely derivative of writers like Ricci, I would highlight a few significant differences. First, Liu Zhi's strict adherence to Islamic notions of Divine Unity caused him to follow the conventions of Muslim scholarship over the centuries and vehemently reject the Christian doctrines of Incarnation and Trinity. Thus he created for his Chinese audience a conceptual distance between Islamic theology and any claims of the divinity of Jesus.

Furthermore, the Jesuits, following the example set by Ricci, had been wont to focus on the Four Books⁷² as repositories of "true" Confucianism, which they portrayed as a manifestation of the "natural religion" that prefigured Christianity. As part of this methodology, they utterly rejected the metaphysical philosophy of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism, calling into question even the teachings of such revered masters as the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi. Ironically, Ricci seems unaware of the historical fact that the canonization of the Four Books was a Song Neo-Confucian innovation, spearheaded by Zhu Xi.⁷³ By contrast, Liu Zhi, who quoted from the Four Books and Five Classics,⁷⁴ also paid homage to the Neo-Confucian luminaries by citing their writings for further substantiation of his arguments. This small but significant difference showed Liu Zhi to be more fully integrated into literati culture, interacting with the tradition as a true insider. His homage to the canon would have put him in good stead with the Confucian authorities during the Kangxi reign, when the Cheng-Zhu school had been restored as official state orthodoxy. These differences confirm that Liu Zhi did not blindly imitate Jesuit or Chinese Catholic scholarship.

FOOTSTEPS AND PITFALLS: MONOTHEISM IN CHINA AND LIU ZHI'S MONUMENTAL TASK

Apart from the interaction and mutual influence that likely flowed between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars in late Ming–early Qing China, something else united them all. Obviously, the shared monotheistic faith of the Abrahamic traditions was a commonality. But whereas the doctrinal differences among Jews, Christians, and Muslims had produced bitter internecine rivalry between these religious communities in the West, in China the emphasis on their similarities drew them together. This is not to say that individuals within the three communities were unaware of or overlooked their differences. To the contrary, hostilities existed, as did interconfessional polemics, played out, as it were, in Chinese. Yet what drew them together was their similarity in the eyes of Chinese society. Illustrating this point, in Chinese history all three communities were at one time or

another identified as *huihui*, an ethnonym most commonly applied to Muslims. It is easy to understand how superficial Chinese observation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims could lead to such an assumption. All three communities came originally from the West, used foreign scripts, expected their men to grow beards, kept their women veiled, sequestered, and endogamous, and, in the case of Jews and Muslims, had a taboo against pork, a major source of protein in China.

Beyond these external differences, as significant as they may have been, lies the fundamental commonality to which Chinese observers may have paid the least attention but which was important in ways most Han Chinese could not grasp. This was the uncompromising monotheistic principle that united the three Abrahamic faiths as they encountered the Chinese cultural imperative. The confessional rigidity and exclusivity that had set Jews, Christians, and Muslims at each other's throats in Europe and the Middle East was contrasted by the Chinese religio-philosophical milieu in which the Three Teachings sometimes clashed but generally coexisted in relative harmony and mutual tolerance. Chinese history had its share of purges and official persecutions, but these were not nearly on the scale of the Crusades and Inquisitions of Western history. Perhaps the greatest factor in this fundamental difference was that the Chinese traditions, unlike the Abrahamic faiths, did not include a belief in a "jealous God" who demanded adherence to His revealed religion to the exclusion of all others. Western observers have often noted with some surprise that in China and much of East Asia many individuals have simultaneously identified with all Three Teachings and this was not seen as internally contradictory.

Accordingly, synthesis and syncretism have occurred more smoothly and with greater regularity in East Asia than in the West. By contrast, the Occidental impulse to resist syncretism and its concomitant "dilution" of doctrines has made the process more dialectical and confrontational. Of course, not far beneath their distinct facades, the exclusivist Abrahamic traditions actually cross-fertilized constantly, though the necessity of each to represent itself as a singular divine revelation required them to deny any debt to the others. Similarly, the Three Teachings in China were mutually polemical, and each refused to admit influence upon its teachings from the others. But the strength of this denial of outside influence is intensified in the Abrahamic faiths by the affirmation of a unique revelation and exclusive relationship to the "one true God." By contrast, the relative tolerance and syncretic tendencies of Chinese civilization provided fertile ground for Buddhism in the period after its initial arrival from India via Central Asia. It could be argued that Buddhism's lack of the exclusive monotheistic "gene" likely facilitated its transposition and naturalization in Chinese culture and society, which nevertheless took centuries.⁷⁵ This was quite the opposite for the Abrahamic traditions in their various manifestations in China. Jews, Christians, and Muslims struggled for

centuries against the Chinese cultural imperative, which tended to absorb rather than convert. Foreign incursions into Confucian-dominated Chinese civilization faced an almost irresistible impulse to assimilate, but in the early phases of their development in China, the foreign monotheistic communities did resist. Ultimately, however, the cultural imperative proved too powerful, and the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities gradually yielded to the pressure to make their peace with the dominant local culture, and they followed similar patterns of assimilation and accommodation.

Assimilation occurred on both the physical and ideological levels. For “diasporic” communities based historically on transplanted, nonproselytizing settlers, like the Jewish and Muslim populations of China, physical assimilation often meant adopting Chinese material culture and intermarrying with Han Chinese. This physical phase paved the way eventually for intellectual accommodation, but the latter occurred only once a critical mass had been reached after centuries of coexistence and comingling, frequently accompanied by the threat of loss of cultural identity due to excessive assimilation. It is on this level that the great works of cultural translation and syncretism, such as the Chinese Jewish inscriptions or the Han Kitāb, were produced.

The case was different for communities founded upon proselytizing missions, including Buddhists, Nestorians, and Jesuits, in that the missionaries did not function as members of Chinese society.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, they often sought methods of accommodation early into their missions as a way of adapting their messages to the local cultural context for the purposes of preaching. Thus these communities did not pass through a long phase of physical assimilation before beginning to produce literature of intellectual rapprochement with Chinese traditions. The simultaneity achieved in the settler, or diasporic, communities by centuries of living in China and developing a dual heritage, both genetically and culturally, did not exist among the missionaries. It was, however, substituted in the faith communities they created by conversion of local Han Chinese, who had a dual allegiance to their native culture and to the foreign belief system they had adopted and whose offspring in later generations engendered true simultaneity. Thus, whereas the Chinese Jewish and Muslim communities required centuries to produce scholars capable of expressing their faith in Chinese terms, Catholic converts included literati who collaborated with their foreign patrons to produce similar apologia. The simultaneity of first-generation Chinese converts to Christianity, however, entailed a bifurcated process, whereby they added, or grafted, Christianity to their existing Chinese worldview, which differs from the Jews, Muslims, and subsequent generations of Chinese Catholics, who were born into this simultaneous state, heirs to a dual cultural and religious heritage.

Evolutionary differences notwithstanding, we have witnessed how similar

beliefs acted upon by similar cultural pressures often yielded similar intellectual products. The literature of the various foreign, transplanted religio-philosophical traditions in China thus share “theological terminology, adoption of Confucian values, Confucianism (portrayed) as an ‘incomplete’ secular doctrine, and . . . the constant tendency to quest for a common origin, going back to the teachings of the ancient sagely rulers.”⁷⁷ According to Zürcher, the “authority, the sheer mass and attractive power of Confucianism was such that any religious system from outside was caught in its field.”⁷⁸ It is then significant in the present context that the “field” Confucianism projected did not include a distinct monotheistic principle and that this belief remained outside the mainstream Chinese cultural context. As a result, foreign religions that were based on monotheism would encounter a similar barrier, not only to proselytization in the Christian case, but even to complete harmonization with the dominant indigenous ideology.

As any powerful, self-confident civilization would, Confucian civilization manifested a natural resistance to whatever it could not assimilate. And the monotheistic traditions, despite efforts at intellectual rapprochement, were uncompromising in their insistence on the exclusive belief in one God. Thus, even with the sophisticated scholarly enterprise of translation of ideas into the classical Chinese idiom, this one sticking point represented the meeting of the proverbial irresistible force and immovable object. Given the difficulty, if not impossibility, of a final reconciliation of monotheism with the Chinese tradition, it is no wonder that the spokesmen for the various Abrahamic faiths would look for inspiration not only to the Chinese tradition for substantiation of their ideas, but also to each other’s thought and writings in Chinese. Thus, for example, Muslim scholars like Liu Zhi could compare their own expressions with those of their Jewish or Christian counterparts and borrow from them approaches that seemed to be effective, while modifying others that were less so. In case they found something that was not only ineffective but also offensive to Chinese sensibilities, they could align themselves with Confucian society by railing against it polemically in their discourse.

Similarities among the Chinese theological formulations of Jews, Christians, and Muslims could have occurred coincidentally, as I am sure many of them did. However, cross-pollination, mutual influence, and borrowing also took place. In his presentation of Islam, particularly its theology, Liu Zhi could not help but retrace many of the steps taken by his monotheistic precursors. In some cases, he did this unconsciously, as a natural result of shared beliefs being adapted to the same cultural circumstances in China. Yet a scholar as erudite, resourceful, and urbane as Liu Zhi would have availed himself of all the intellectual tools within his reach. This surely included consulting not only the vast Chinese and Islamic literary traditions and the writings of his Chinese Muslim forebears, but also works of the Jesuits and Chinese Catholics, which were in circulation at the time.

These works would have served as an important frame of reference for his own efforts, as well as a source. Most importantly, Liu Zhi could learn from the mistakes of his counterparts and seek to correct them and avoid them in his own writings.

Chinese Muslim scholars enjoyed a certain advantage over their Jesuit counterparts because of their genuine Chinese Muslim simultaneity. Their advantage over similarly Chinese Catholic converts lay in the fact that most of the Han Kitāb writers had studied Arabic and/or Persian from a young age, whereas Christian converts, if they learned Latin or other European languages at all, mainly did so as adults. While Liu Zhi's linguistic accomplishments of learning the Islamic languages at a high level were exceptional, this multilingual condition was not unique in his community, but was a feature of the Chinese Muslim simultaneity of the Han Kitāb scholars. The scholars of this community also held an advantage over their Chinese Jewish counterparts because they maintained a more vigorous link to their co-religionists abroad, which gave them access to the living Islamic tradition. Liu Zhi, in particular, had a tremendous historical advantage of coming after all of these precedents and being able to learn from their missteps. He rested at the pinnacle of Chinese Muslim scholarship and at the convergence of geographical, dynastic, and chronological factors that enabled him, in combination with his own diligence and talents, to express his Chinese Islamic simultaneity with unprecedented clarity and sophistication. These conditions made him arguably the most successful of the Han Kitāb writers in terms of acceptance both inside and outside his community.

And yet despite these many advantages, ultimately his efforts at harmonizing the Islamic and Confucian traditions fell somewhat short of the mark. We will recall that his *Tianfang dianli* was the only Chinese Muslim book to merit inclusion in the catalogue of the *Siku quanshu* imperial compendium under the auspices of the Qianlong emperor. Indeed, it was the only monotheistic religious text to have made it into the catalogue at all. This distinction—and Liu Zhi's considerable, albeit posthumous, achievement—should in no way be minimized. In assessing the *Tianfang dianli*, though, the *Siku quanshu* editor praised Liu Zhi's eloquence and erudition but found it necessary to write, "Islam is fundamentally far-fetched and absurd." He continued, asserting that "the premise is at its root untrue and so (Liu Zhi's) clever literary ornamentation does him no good." Thus one of the most successful Chinese Muslim writers, even given the chance to build and improve upon the efforts of his predecessors and learn from the mistakes of historical precedent, could not find a way to express his beliefs in a way that could persuade Confucian readers of their validity. Regardless of what name Liu Zhi called Allah in Chinese, he could not, in the end, overcome the fundamental obstacle of Chinese resistance to the uncompromising monotheism of Islam.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Liu Zhi did not universally convince the Confucian literati establishment of the truth of Islam, yet his efforts were successful in achieving expressed goals. We must not get sidetracked and bogged down by questions of “successful” versus “unsuccessful” assimilation or syncretism, as if there were some objective criteria by which to gauge such things. We should, rather, bear in mind in assessing Liu Zhi’s work that success must be understood in subtle ways. The important question is not whether Liu Zhi successfully syncretized disparate religious, philosophical, and cultural ideas, or whether he facilitated the spread or survival of his faith, or even whether he paved the way for a better mode of assimilation for Muslims in China. The only questions that we can answer based on his writings are what his objectives were and whether or not he achieved them. As observed in the preceding chapters, Liu Zhi constructed effective arguments for the harmonization of Confucian and Islamic ideas of morality and ethics, hinging upon the concept of ritual. And while he did manage to syncretize certain important metaphysical concepts of the two traditions, he ultimately could not bridge the theological gap that divided them. Yet syncretism was Liu Zhi’s method, not his goal—promoting better understanding of Islam was. Did he arrive at a conceptualization and formulation of Muslim law and theology that would persuade Han Chinese society of the ultimate validity of Islamic doctrine? Clearly not, but his aspiration was never so ambitious. Accepting the premise that the main mission of the Han Kitāb scholars in general was bifurcated—reaching sinicized Chinese Muslims in order to keep them in the fold of Islam and thereby mitigate losses to outright assimilation, *and* persuading urbane and literary Muslims and non-

Muslims of the essential harmony of Islamic values with Confucian ethics—Liu Zhi enjoyed success in both regards.

We have seen the testimony of the Muslim and non-Muslim writers who contributed prefaces to the *Tianfang dianli* and Liu Zhi's other books. These clearly demonstrate recognition and acceptance of his work during his lifetime by his literati colleagues on both sides of his dual audience. But we may also measure Liu Zhi's success in terms of his succession, that is, how his legacy influenced future generations posthumously. In addition to the prefaces just mentioned, there were also succeeding generations of later Han Kitāb disciples, or *houxue*, who looked up to Liu Zhi and wrote laudatory prefaces and commentaries for editions of his books published after his death. Arguably the most widely circulated of all of Liu Zhi's writings, the *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, was not even published until 1785 by Yuan Guozuo, the grandson of Liu Zhi's teacher Yuan Ruqi, many years after Liu Zhi had died. The very fact that his books continued to be printed and reprinted in multiple editions long after he died is solid evidence of Liu Zhi's lasting influence on the continuing survival and development of the Chinese Muslim educational system and scholarly network. Interestingly, completing a full circle, some of Liu Zhi's writings, including parts of the *Tianfang xingli*, were translated into Arabic in Yunnan in the late nineteenth century to be used as texts in local mosque education. As we have also seen, Liu Zhi continued to be revered even among later generations of Chinese Muslim laypeople, as the inscription on his tomb in Nanjing indicates.

Another aspect of Liu Zhi's legacy among his co-religionists was based on developments in the early twentieth century, far away from the highly assimilated Chinese Muslim communities of Nanjing and eastern China. Liu Zhi's writings, together with other Han Kitāb literature, became the core curriculum for the Xidaotang (lit. "Hall of the Western Way"), a completely native Chinese religious solidarity founded by Ma Qixi (1857–1914) in Gansu Province.¹ The Xidaotang revered Liu Zhi as one of the seminal contributors to their curriculum and their worldview, which saw the future of Muslims in China as being inextricably linked to the fortunes of a rapidly modernizing Chinese nation.

It would be impossible to estimate how many later Chinese Muslims' lives were impacted, directly or indirectly, by the legacy of Liu Zhi's writings. We know that the *Tianfang dianli* enjoyed pre-eminent status among the Han Kitāb corpus due to its inclusion in the catalogue of the *Siku quanshu* during the reign of the Qianlong emperor. One of Liu Zhi's books also figures prominently in an incident involving a Muslim student, various government officials, and the emperor himself.²

In the summer of 1782, during a period which saw Muslim rebellions in China's southwestern and northwestern frontier regions, a Muslim student named

Hai Furun was arrested by local officials in Guangxi Province on suspicion of sedition simply because he was found in possession of a copy of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*. After a protracted criminal investigation in which dozens of Chinese Muslims in various cities were rounded up by local authorities, the case reached the court of the Qianlong emperor. He ruled that the officials had exceeded their authority and that neither the book nor the Muslim subjects implicated in the case posed any danger to the state. Apparently, the emperor was able to distinguish between the Muslim rebels of western China and the loyal, sinicized Muslims of eastern China, those schooled by a curriculum featuring the harmonizing writings of Liu Zhi, whose work had been presented to the throne.

This story highlights the most enduring aspect of Liu Zhi's legacy: the ethic he embodied and which shines clearly through his body of works. This was none other than his ability to bring together seemingly disparate phenomena into an extremely erudite and systematic opus, such that even those who did not agree with his ideas could not but acknowledge the skill and talent with which they were organized and articulated. From his followers and those who shared his beliefs in subsequent generations, Liu Zhi received the highest veneration. Liu Zhi came to be regarded as a "great integrator" (*ji da cheng*), an epithet originally used by Mencius in praise of Confucius³ and later applied by Yuan Guozuo to Muḥammad in an effort to analogize the Prophet of Islam with the sages of China.⁴

In his capacity as integrator and synthesizer, Liu Zhi was the embodiment of a thousand-year meeting between Islam and China. In his ability to see beyond geographical distinctions to envision a universal and ubiquitous truth, he proved himself to be the heir of both traditions. From the Chinese side of his heritage, he echoed Confucius and Mencius, who upheld the notion that righteousness and sagehood were not the monopoly of China, a belief that found its strongest expression in the universalist teachings of the Song dynasty Neo-Confucian Lu Xiangshan, who spoke of sages coming from both the East and the West. The Islamic tradition to which Liu Zhi was heir likewise affirmed that such distinctions as East and West were relative and arbitrary in the context of God's universal dominion.⁵

The Qur'ān includes a peculiar geographical reference to Allah as "Lord of the two Easts and Lord of the two Wests."⁶ Traditional exegetes have interpreted this as referring to the astronomical phenomenon of two different points of sunrise and sunset at different times of the year. However, taking the license to interpret it metaphorically, perhaps this obscure verse has a deeper meaning that reflects the unique situation of Islam between the power bases of Europe and East Asia. From the Western perspective, Islam has traditionally been understood as part of the exotic "Oriental" world, albeit not as remote geographically or culturally as the "Celestial" Empire of China. Hence, Islam, from the point of view of Western observers, is one of "two Easts." The situation is, of course, reversed from the East

Asian perspective, where both Islam and Christendom are two points in an alien "Occident." Thus, while Han Chinese observers in late imperial China may have been able to distinguish between their Chinese Muslim neighbors (aptly described as "familiar strangers" by Lipman) and Western missionaries and imperialists, they nevertheless regarded their various teachings as similarly foreign.

We live today in a time of unprecedented intercultural contact. Whether we like it or not, globalization has brought virtually every culture in the world to the doorstep of every other. The notion of an ever-shrinking world, however hackneyed, is undeniable. Consequently, the need for cultures to arrive at mutual understanding has never been greater. Having examined the life and works of Liu Zhi, we may speculate as to the relevance of such a study to our present world.

Some on either side of today's confrontation between militant Islam and a coalition led by the United States have characterized it as a rehashing of the Crusades. There are historical parallels to be sure, but the circumstances of today are also very different than those behind the medieval conflict. On some level, one could also argue that the dynamics of contemporary intercivilizational conflict were set in motion when ships from the great Western imperial powers arrived in East Asia. At that time, China encountered the concerted effort of colonial forces and Christian missionaries to reshape Chinese civilization in its likeness and image. Within the melting pot of Chinese culture around the same time, various minorities and subethnicities were also beginning to assert their own cultural identities. Among them were Chinese Muslims, who despite their long-ago foreign ancestry saw themselves as part of Chinese society after centuries of naturalization. Influential members of their community, embracing the ethic of the Han Chinese literati class, attempted to close ranks with their Confucian compatriots against the ideological incursions of Christian missionaries, who, by proclaiming themselves as saviors of the Chinese people, distanced themselves from Chinese society.

From the late Ming through the Qing periods, various cultural communities clashed in their respective quests for identity, legitimacy, and security. Chinese Muslims were part of this *mêlée*, yet even in their opposition to other groups, such as Buddhists, Jews, or Jesuits, they maintained the civil tone required by Confucian standards of decorum.⁷ Confucianized Muslim scholars did not resort to the demonization of their rivals by the use of such facile and vulgar terms as "evil." Rather, they employed a Confucian discourse that pitted orthodoxy against heterodoxy. This may seem like a subtle distinction, but it represents and engenders a powerful difference in terms of attitude and perception. Someone espousing heterodox teachings may indeed be deluded by a pernicious doctrine and may actively seek to spread this to others. However, heterodoxy is not an irredeemable ontological state, but rather a condition. As such, it can be corrected, unlike absolute evil, which can only be opposed and vanquished. According to

Confucian ideology, heterodoxy must also be opposed, even forcefully, but in so doing its proponents may be reformed.

The idea that even the barbarian can become cultivated is a central tenet of the Confucian worldview. Those accused of heterodoxy were sometimes purged by force in imperial Chinese history, but not to any degree comparable to the inquisitions of Christendom.⁸ More often than not, battles were waged on the field of rhetoric, in the dialectic of polemics met with apologetics. In this cultural and ideological context, even as Chinese Muslim literati opposed other religious-cultural factions, they nevertheless tacitly acknowledged the common heritage shared by Islamic and Judeo-Christian monotheism by borrowing from the expressions coined by Jews and Christians in Chinese. Thus, as the Jesuit Ricci observed, the “cosmic” internecine struggles among the Abrahamic faiths that had ravaged Europe and the Middle East for centuries were played out intellectually in the arena of Confucian society. In this Chinese manifestation of the conflict, the goal was not eradication of the opponent, but persuasion by means of the better argument.

Those at the forefront of today’s conflicts have moved away from ideological characterizations of it toward a saber-rattling rhetoric of civilizations in which either side decries the barbarism of the irredeemable “Other.” Moreover, in the vicissitudes of international relations, the manipulation of global markets and bloodshed in the cause of promoting or repelling hegemony have outpaced the rhetoric that originally spawned them. Whether it is a *sui generis* phenomenon, or a case of life imitating geopolitical theory, the clash of civilizations is upon us.

In light of this state of affairs, perhaps there is no better time than now to look to earlier episodes of encounter between civilizations, in which there was conflict but in which the stakes were not raised to cosmic proportions by the perception or portrayal of an ultimate struggle between good and evil. The Chinese Muslim scholars of the Han Kitāb never issued a call for *jihād* against the “infidel.” Nor did the Confucian authorities call for the wholesale slaughter of Muslims, Buddhists, Jews, or Christians in late imperial China. The pen, or calligraphy brush as the case may be, was the weapon of choice over the sword. When the West encountered the “two Easts” on the fertile ground of Confucian literati culture and society, cultural disagreements were negotiated quite differently than has become the custom today. There is a lesson to be learned from the ironic fact that in the earlier “clash of civilizations,” when some Muslims aligned themselves with Confucians against Christian Westerners, the rules of engagement were exceedingly more civilized.⁹ In the lessons of history to today’s war-weary world we may find the greatest legacy of luminaries such as the “great integrator” Liu Zhi, who, from a perspective of ethnic and religious simultaneity, so remarkably navigated the rough waters of transcultural translation.

NOTES

PREFACE

1. James D. Frankel, “Liu Zhi’s Journey Through Ritual Law to Allah’s Chinese: Conceptual Antecedents and Theological Obstacles to the Confucian-Islamic Harmonization of the *Tianfang Dianli*” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1. Liu Zhi, “*Zhushu Shu*,” in Bai Shouyi, ed., *Huizhu renwu zhi (Qingdai)* (Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 1992), pp. 357–358.

INTRODUCTION

1. The term Han Kitāb is composed of the character *han*, bearing the general meaning “Chinese,” and the Arabic word (also used in Persian and Turkish) *kitāb*, meaning “book.”
2. Katherine Miller, *Communication Theories: Perspective, Processes and Contexts*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), pp. 155–156.
3. Few Muslim minority communities have remained as isolated from the main body of the Islamic *umma*, or nation, as the Muslims of China. Other sizable Muslim minority populations have historically been associated with a larger Muslim society or polity. For example, the now isolated Muslims of the Balkans, most notably in Bosnia, were originally a community that received direct support from the Ottoman Empire. In the case of Mughal India, Muslims actually reigned as the ruling minority amidst a Hindu majority. Contemporary Muslim minorities in Western countries are largely made up of immigrants

who still identify and maintain contact with their native or ancestral countries where Islam is the majority religion.

4. Cf. Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), p. 204ff. See also Ben-Dor's "'Even unto China': Displacement and Chinese Muslim Myths of Origin," *Bulletin of the Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies* (Winter 2002/3): pp. 93–114.
5. Jonathan Lipman, *Familiar Strangers: A History of Muslims in Northwest China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), p. 72.

CHAPTER 1: THE WORLD OF LIU ZHI

1. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 74.
2. *Ibid.*, p. xxxiii.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
4. Benjamin A. Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China*, UCLA Asian Pacific Monograph Series (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001), p. vi.
5. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
6. *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, p. 2640. See Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 150. This remark appears in the entry about the *Tianfang dianli* in the *Siku quanshu* (The Imperial Compendium of the Four Treasuries), which is discussed in greater detail in chapter 2.
7. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 145.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
9. Sachiko Murata, *Chinese Gleams of Sufi Light: Wang Tai-yü's Great Learning of the Pure and Real and Liu Chih's Displaying the Concealment of the Real Realm* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), p. 24.
10. See Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 144.
11. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 81.
12. Liu Zhi, "Zi xu," in *Tianfang dianli zeyao jie* (reprint, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Muslim Propagation Society, 1971), p. a12.
13. Arthur Waley, trans. *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Vintage, 1989), p. 123, VII:1. Alternatively: "Following the proper way, I do not forge new paths; with confidence I cherish the ancients" (Roger T. Ames and Henry Rosemont Jr., trans., *The Analects of Confucius: A Philosophical Translation* [New York: Ballantine, 1998], p. 111, 7.1).
14. Zheng Mianzhi et al., eds. *Yisilanjiao jianming cidian* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Press, 1993); Zheng Mianzhi et al., eds. "Liu Zhi," in *Yisilanjiao jianming cidian* (Nanjing: Jiangsu Ancient Books Press, 1993), p. 169.
15. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 76, 2.4.
16. Liu Zhi, "Zhushu shu" (Telling about Writing Books), in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 357.

17. Alternatively, this could mean that he studied the *Xingli daquan* (Complete Compendium of Metaphysics), by Hu Guang (1370–1418).
18. Jing Rizhen, “Yizhai shuxu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a5.
19. Liu Zhi, “Zhushu shu,” in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, pp. 357–360.
20. Some scholars, most notably Nohara Shiro, have argued that when Liu Zhi mentioned so large a number of “Occidental books,” he could not have meant only European works, but probably included Arabic and Persian texts as well (Nohara Shiro, “*Tempō tenrei taku yōkai no hōyaku nisaishite*,” p. 81, cited in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 213 n. 26). Ford, however, went so far as to say that in this context, “Hsi-yang books . . . could only mean European ones” (Joseph H. Ford, “Some Chinese Muslims of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,” *Asian Affairs* 61:2 [1974]: p. 150). It would be odd for Liu Zhi to mention his years devoted to Arabic and Persian texts in a separate sentence and then also intend to subsume these under the vague description of Western texts. Furthermore, in a preface to the *Tianfang dianli*, Yang Peilu specifically mentions “European writings” when enumerating Liu Zhi’s many achievements. (Yang Peilu, “Yang xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a7). As Liu Zhi never cited specific texts from among the Occidental books, we can only speculate about how many or which ones he actually read. Yet, based upon subtle allusions suggesting Jesuit influences in Liu Zhi’s writing, there is no doubt that he read *some* Jesuit texts, which he could have easily acquired in his native Nanjing (cf. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 146 n. 72 and p. 166).
21. The European works translated into Chinese by the Jesuits beginning in the sixteenth century included a wide range of Western classics: moral philosophy and metaphysics from Plato, Aristotle, Epictetus, and others; works on mathematics, Euclidean geometry, astronomy, and a number of other scientific disciplines; classical Greek and Latin poems and essays; and, of course, major works of Christian theologians, including Augustine and Aquinas.
22. Yang Peilu, “Yang xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a7.
23. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 145.
24. Ibid.
25. Ibid., p. 144.
26. Ibid., pp. 95–96.
27. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 81.
28. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 146.
29. Wumen is the name of one of the gates of the former Ming palace complex in Nanjing. This implies that after a northern journey through Shandong to Beijing, Liu Zhi returned to his hometown before a separate excursion to southern China.
30. Several places share the name Wulin, so it is difficult to say which is meant. One is in Jiangxi Province and another in Anhui Province. Wulin is also an old alternate name for the city of Hangzhou in Zhejiang Province. We may infer from the fact that Liu Zhi says that he passed through the Wu Gate of Nanjing, in the eastern part of the city, that he meant to refer to Hangzhou, which is to the southeast of Nanjing.

31. This is most likely the name of a mountain (Guijishan) in Zhejiang Province, or possibly an alternate name for Suzhou in Jiangsu Province.
32. Yue is an alternate name for Guangdong Province.
33. Jin Yijiu, ed., “Liu Zhi,” in *Yisilanjiao cidian* (Shanghai: Shanghai Dictionary Press, 1997), p. 483.
34. This has been identified by Leslie as the *Tarjuma i Mawlūd i Muṣṭafā*, a 1383 Persian translation of an Arabic original text, identified by Ben-Dor as the *Sīrat al-Nabī al-Muntaqā* (Selected Biography of the Prophet), by Saʿīd al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Kāzārūnī (d. 1357 CE) (Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 207). The Persian version is attributed to al-Kāzārūnī’s son ‘Afīf (Donald D. Leslie, *Islamic Literature in Chinese, Late Ming and Early Ch’ing: Books, Authors and Associates* [Canberra: Canberra College of Advanced Education, 1981], p. 49).
35. The term *zhisheng* is difficult to translate. The word *zhi* as a verb means “to arrive” or “to reach.” From this comes its adjectival meaning of “extreme” or “utmost.” It would therefore be possible to translate *zhisheng*, as an epithet for the Prophet, as the “perfected sage.” However, I have opted for the rendering “ultimate sage,” since ultimate implies the sense of perfection and also retains the sense of reaching a pinnacle as the final station, or rank, in an ordinal/chronological sequence, a traditional Islamic understanding of Muḥammad’s place in the lineage of prophets, emphasized by Liu Zhi.
36. Hei Mingfeng, also known by the cognomen (*zi*) Yuhui, earned the military Jinshi degree in 1703. His biography appears in Bai, ed. *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, pp. 66–67.
37. The latter is Hei Mingfeng’s *Tianfang xingli benjing zhushi*, published 1707, cited in Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 208 n. 106.
38. For a discussion of the flexibility of the definition of “native place” in China, see Emily Honig, “Native Place and Chinese Ethnicity,” in Gail Hershat et al., eds. *Remapping China: Fissures in Historical Terrain* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 144–145.
39. See Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 2. Tianfang (lit. “square of heaven”) is thought to refer originally to the Ka’ba in Mecca. By extension, in Chinese, it is used as the traditional name for Arabia, while in traditional Chinese Muslim usage it has come to mean anything “Islamic” generally.
40. Despite his reference to Arabia (Tianfang), Murata states that Wang Daiyu was more likely of Persian ancestry (Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 20).
41. Wang Daiyu wrote, “Our family has been in China for three hundred years, and although we have thoroughly settled down we are not forgetful of our origins” (Ford, “Some Chinese Muslims,” p. 145).
42. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 39.
43. Ibid.
44. Jiangnan (lit. “south of the river”) refers to the region abutting the southern side of the lower Yangzi River (also known as the Changjiang, or “long river”) valley, especially

- the densely populated, economically developed, and highly cultured area encompassing southern Jiangsu and Anhui, eastern Hubei, and northern Jiangxi and Zhejiang provinces.
45. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 61.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
 47. So named for its basis in the teachings of Song dynasty philosophers Cheng Hao (1032–1085), Cheng Yi (1033–1107), and Zhu Xi (1130–1200).
 48. See, e.g., Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), pp. 212–216.
 49. Philip A. Kuhn, *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 60.
 50. Elliott, *The Manchu Way*, pp. 3–5.
 51. Pamela Kyle Crossley, “Manzhou yuanliu kao and the Formalization of Manchu Heritage,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 46.4 (1987): p. 779.
 52. Pamela Kyle Crossley, “The Rulerships of China,” *American Historical Review* 97.5 (1992): p. 1483.
 53. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 12–13. Ben-Dor credits Crossley with providing the theoretical framework to view “Chinese Muslimness” in this nuanced way. Crossley, however, used the term “simultaneous” in a different context: to describe the protean character of Qing emperorship, whose edicts and policies were a “simultaneous expression of imperial intentions in multiple cultural frames” (Pamela Kyle Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror: History and Identity in Qing Imperial Ideology* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999], p. 11).
 54. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 201.
 55. *Ibid.*
 56. Liu Zhi did not mention politics or the state in his own text, but included in the *Tianfang dianli* is a preface by his Chinese Muslim colleague Yang Peilu (see biographical note in Leslie, *Islamic Literature in Chinese*, p. 94), which praised the Kangxi emperor and his political relations with Muslims:

The sage son of Heaven has now presided over the empire for forty-eight years. Virtue covers the realm, benefiting the areas both inside and outside China. The emperor first installed a sovereign in Hami, thereby giving the state of Hami a new lease on life. He was presented with gifts and feted, treated with kindness and abundant generosity. Moreover, by specially dispatching a young gentleman official to escort him through the pass, our sovereign’s manner of showing kindness to people from distant lands reached its extreme. Thus, it may be said that the Islamic people heard about and admired the emperor’s reputation for righteousness, and so they scaled mountains and crossed seas to come in droves, following closely upon each other’s heels. (Yang Peilu, “Yang xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a7; also, Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, pp. 363–364)

57. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 149. Ma Zhu had petitioned the throne to grant him special status as a Sayyid, or descendant of the Prophet, analogous to the status enjoyed by descendants of Confucius.
58. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. x.
59. See Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 149.
60. Hence such historical developments of the great “Han Synthesis” of Confucian, Daoist, and Legalist teachings in the second century BCE, and the co-option of Daoist and Buddhist metaphysical concepts by the Song dynasty masters of Cheng-Zhu Neo-Confucianism, which occurred despite the persistent orthodox Confucian denunciation of the “two heresies.”
61. The most significant settlement of Persians in Tang China actually consisted of non-Muslims refugees fleeing the Arab conquests. These included Zoroastrians, Manichaeans, Jews, and Nestorians.
62. Foster Stockwell, *Religion in China Today* (Beijing: New World, 1993), p. 5.
63. Peter Hopkirk, *Foreign Devils on the Silk Road* (London: John Murray, 1980), p. 28.
64. For example, see Liu Xinru, *Silk and Religion: An Exploration of Material Life and the Thought of People, AD 600–1200* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 40; and F. W. Mote, *Imperial China, 900–1800*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 501.
65. Liang Yijun, a disciple of the Han Kitāb author Wang Daiyu, actually used the term “Four Teachings” (Sijiao) to describe the expertise of his teacher. In a preface to the *Zhengjiao zhenquan*, Liang Yijun referred to his “teacher’s mastery of the ‘Four Teachings’ and thorough study of the various philosophers” (Liang Yijun, “Preface” [Xu] in Wang Daiyu. *Zhongguo huizu guji congshu*: “Zhengjiao zhenquan,” “Qingzhen daxue,” “Xizhen zhengda” [Yinchuan: Ningxia People’s Press, 1988], p. 3).
66. Among Khubilai Khān’s policies that represented a radical departure from Chinese tradition was the establishment of a four-tiered social hierarchy, based primarily on ethnic and/or cultural distinctions. The top class comprised the Mongols, followed by the Semuren, “consisting mostly of Western and Central Asians, who because they performed valuable services for the Mongols were accorded higher status than the indigenous peoples” (Morris Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan: His Life and Times* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], p. 71). Next in the hierarchy were the Hanren (northern Chinese and Jurchens). Finally there were the Nanren (southern Chinese). Despite the obvious ethnic division of the hierarchy, it may also be viewed as a descending order of those groups whom Khubilai regarded as most trustworthy and useful (Rossabi, *Khubilai Khan*, p. 71). It so happens that the Semu class, due to the geographical and ethnic origins of its constituents, consisted in large part of foreign Muslims, who were especially favored by Khubilai and occupied the second most prominent position in a stratified, multicultural society.

CHAPTER 2: CHINESE MUSLIM TRADITION AND LIU ZHI'S LEGACY

1. “It is (incumbent) upon you to (abide) by my *Sunna* and that of the Rightly-guided successors, so cling to these (as if) with clenched teeth! Beware of novelties in matters of religion, for every novelty is an innovation, and every innovation is a deviation, and every deviation (ends up) in the Fire” (Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Al-Arbaʿūn al-Nawawīyya*, trans. Ezzedin Ibrahim and Denys Johnson-Davies [London: Ta-Ha, 1998], pp. 94–95.)
2. 46:9.
3. Ibid.
4. For example, Liu Zhi wrote that since Islam traces its roots back to the divine revelation to Adam, it “is the oldest Teaching in the world and nothing exceeds it in antiquity” (Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 3).
5. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a11.
6. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b1.
7. “He who received the mandate to promulgate the Teaching, upheld and received the great tradition, but totally reformed the scriptures of previous sages, in order to set the standard for ten thousand generations to follow, is called the ‘final sage’ (or ‘most holy’). This is only the single individual, Muhammad, and none other. The Way of Heaven was thus transmitted from one generation to the next” (Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4).

Liu Zhi’s descriptions of how the revelations to Muhammad confirm, revise, supplant, or, when necessary, abrogate previous revelations is also reminiscent of how he describes his own efforts to cut down and consolidate the work of earlier Muslim scholars in the *Tianfang dianli*. About the work of the Prophet he wrote, “[T]he sage received the mandate to delete some things and fix others in place. He preserved the truth and omitted falsehood. Returning from a broad range of subjects, he restored it to a simplified form” (Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 5).

Compare this with his description of his own efforts: “I selected from the whole body of literature those things most relevant to quotidian matters of people’s livelihood and concerns. I have brought these together under a single cover, calling them the ‘Selected Essential Rites’” (Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a11).
8. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b1. In this assertion, Liu Zhi appears to be echoing his description of the actions of the Prophets of Islam in their dissemination of knowledge: “It was not Adam and the sages themselves who proposed these ideas, nor did they presume to do so” (Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 3).
9. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*.
10. Ibid., p. b1.
11. “Sages could see all activities under heaven, and, observing their interaction, worked out laws and rites (i.e., *dianli*)” (“Great Treatise” [*Dazhuan* or *Xicizhuan*], “The Ten Wings,” in Richard Rutt, trans., *The Book of Changes*, Durham East-Asia Series, No. 1 [Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1996], p. 413.)

12. Theories about the metaphysical values of the letters of the Arabic alphabet have roots in pre-Islamic poetry and subsequently became an element of Qur'ānic exegesis. Like the Kabbalists who theorized about the hidden spiritual meaning of letters and numbers with respect to the Torah, many Sufis also indulged in theories about how “God was revealed in the word” and therefore speculated about the esoteric meaning of letters. See Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), pp. 339, 411–425. The Ḥurūfī (lit. “those who deal with letters”) Sufi order, founded in the fourteenth century CE by Faḍlullāh Astarābādī, is particularly noted for its elaborate theories on this subject.

Liu Zhi's book reflected the Islamic scholarly pursuit of philology as a religious science used to unlock deeper meanings of the Qur'ān and other religious literature. It also seems to reflect the Confucian literati tradition in which philology was for centuries an erudite intellectual pastime, but had more recently assumed a pivotal role in the definition of orthodoxy in the *kaozheng* (“evidentiary studies”) movement.

Liu Zhi's discussion proceeds to draw upon the division of the Arabic alphabet into two groups, termed the “sun” and “moon” letters respectively. He refers to these two groups as *yang* (“solar”) letters and *yin* (“lunar”) letters, using the dual cosmic principles of *yin-yang* to express metaphysical characteristics inherent in the Arabic script. In this way, he used the discussion of Arabic script to promote the syncretism of Chinese and Islamic metaphysical concepts.

13. For example, Wang Yangming (1472–1529) was frequently accused of being a clandestine Buddhist because some of his thought showed signs of Buddhist influence, even though he clearly articulated differences between Buddhism and Confucianism, rejected the fundamental premises of the former, and averred his devotion to the latter. See Wing-tsit Chan, ed., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963], pp. 677–678).
14. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b3.
15. Ma Zhu, for example, spoke of the Three Teachings and the movement to syncretize them as an “affliction” (Ma Zhu, *Qingzhen zhinan*, reprint [Tianjin: Huizu Zhongguo Yisilanjiao, 1987], p. 109).
16. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 148.
17. Al-Tirmidhī, no. 2611.
18. Ford, “Some Chinese Muslims,” p. 150.
19. There may actually be sixty-seven or sixty-eight, depending on whether some are repeated under slightly different names or not.
20. Donald Daniel Leslie and Mohamed Wassel, “Arabic and Persian Sources used by Liu Chih,” *Central Asiatic Journal* 26.1–2 (1982): p. 108.
21. Quoted in Leslie Wassel, “Arabic and Persian Sources,” p. 78.
22. See the essays in Frederick De Jong and Bernd Radtke, eds., *Islamic Mysticism Con-tested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies and Polemics* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1999), for evidence from all over the Islamic world.

23. Tazaka states that there are as many as twelve Sufi works between Liu Zhi's two lists of sources. (*Chugoku*, pp. 1286–1289, cited in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 214 n. 32.) Leslie and Wassel have identified a number of these positively and several others speculatively. See "Arabic and Persian Sources," pp. 78–104.
24. This title, by 'Azīz bin Muḥammad al-Nasafī (d. 1263 CE), may be translated as "The Highest Aim."
25. This title, by Nūr al-Dīn 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (1414–1492 CE), may be translated as "Rays of Brilliance."
26. This title, also by Jāmī, may be translated as "Signs in the Elucidation of the Meanings of Perception." In addition to these four books, Liu Zhi also listed among his sources several other well-known (mostly Persian) Sufi works, including *Kashf al-Mahjūb* (Revealing the Concealed) by Hujwīrī; *Kashf al-Asrār* (Revealing the Secrets) by Maybudī; and *Tadhkirat al-Awliyā'* (Remembrance of the Saints) by 'Aṭṭār (Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 214 n. 32).
27. Leslie and Wassel, "Arabic and Persian Sources," p. 85.
28. The *Mirṣād*, as we have seen above, was translated by Wu Zunqi in the 1660s. She Yunshan translated the *Maqṣad* (1679) and probably the *Ashi* 'a as well, under the pen name Po Nachi (see Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 33, and Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, pp. 32–34, 42–43). Po Nachi translated the title in Chinese as *Feiyin jing* (The Classic of Expending the Concealed), though Murata (*Chinese Gleams*, p. 33) gives the alternate title *Zhaoyuan mijue* (Mysterious Formula of the Luminous Origin). The transliterated title also has two variants: *E-shen-er-ting* (Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 43), and *E-shi-er*, under which name it appears in the bibliography of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang xingli*. The *Lawā'ih* was translated into Chinese by Liu Zhi himself, under the title *Zhaowei jing* (The Classic of Illuminating Subtleties).
29. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 23.
30. We shall see later how this term, *jing*, was used by Liu Zhi and other Chinese Muslim writers not only to refer to Islamic "scriptures," but also to describe, in the same vein, the canon of Confucianism and other Chinese traditions.
31. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 56.
32. From Zhao Can's genealogy we know that Yuan Shengzhi had two main disciples: his son, Yuan Ruqi, and a scholar named Ma Jinyi. Ma Jinyi was known to have excelled in Arabic philology (see Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 63–64). From this fact, we may infer that Yuan Shengzhi taught this discipline to all his students, including his son, who may have in turn imparted this knowledge to Liu Zhi. Also from Zhao Can, we learn that Yuan Shengzhi had been a classmate of Chang Yunhua (b. ca. 1610), when both were under the tutelage of Ma Zhenwu (b. ca. 1600). Chang Yunhua was Bukharan by birth, arriving in China at the age of eight with his father on a tribute mission from Samarqand to the Ming court (Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 49). As he came from Central Asia, we may speculate that he had direct contact with Sufi practitioners, perhaps members of the Naqshabandi order that predominated in the land of his birth. While he became fully

sinicized and assimilated into the world of Chinese Muslim literati culture, participating in the Jingtang Jiaoyu educational system and contributing to an important branch of the scholarly network that would lead to the production of the Han Kitāb, there are hints in his biography that suggest he may have been indoctrinated in Central Asian Sufi teachings. For one thing, he was known by the honorific title Baba, a sobriquet used more commonly by Muslims in China's Sufi-dominated northwest than in the more sinicized eastern communities, such as Jining, where Chang Yunhua established his school. Baba is a Chinese word for father, but is also used around the world, including in the Turko-Persian world, where in addition to father, it refers to any old man or fatherly figure, especially one with a reputation for religious learning and piety. In both the Islamic heartland and in northwest China, it is a title given particularly to the elders or leaders (Ar. *shaykh*, Pers. *pīr*) of a Sufi order. (See Wang Jianping, *A Glossary of Chinese Islamic Terms* [London: Curzon, 2002], p. 10.) That Chang Yunhua went by this title suggests, perhaps, a connection to Sufi ordination. Thus the father of Liu Zhi's teacher may also have had a personal connection and familiarity with living Sufi practice, a rare link in China, where the intellectual Sufism of the Han Kitāb and the working mystics of the Sufi orders in the Northwest (and later the Southwest) have seldom mixed. Liu Zhi almost certainly received instruction in several prominent Sufi texts from his teacher. In a 1704 preface to his student's *Tianfang xingli*, Yuan Ruqi specifically mentioned the *Mirṣād* and *Lawā'ih* by name as standard texts commonly known to Chinese Muslim scholars (Yuan Ruqi, "Xu," in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 371; cf. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 29).

33. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 77.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 83.
35. Liu Zhi, "Zi xu," in *Tianfang xingli*, p. 1a, cited and translated in Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 148–149.
36. Ford, "Some Chinese Muslims," p. 150.
37. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 83.
38. Liu Zhi, "Zhushu shu," in Bai, ed. *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 357.
39. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 151.
40. For example, in 1780 Yuan Guozuo, the grandson of Yuan Ruqi, published a comprehensive Chinese Muslim bibliography titled the *Tianfang qunshu xu* (Introduction to the Collected Books of Islam). Yuan Guozuo was responding to the enthusiasm for bibliographical work that swept China in the late eighteenth century (Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 156–157). There is no question, however, of Yuan Guozuo's relationship and debt to Liu Zhi; besides scholarly ties and the fact that he edited a later edition of Liu Zhi's *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*, the Yuan and Liu families were related and formed the most important Chinese Muslim scholarly lineage in Nanjing.
41. See Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology*, p. 160.
42. Yuan Ruqi, "Xu," in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 372.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 227.

44. Ibid., p. 226–227.
45. See Jin Ding, “Liu Jielian xiansheng mubei” (Master Liu Jielian’s Tombstone), in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, pp. 360–362; cf. a photograph of the tombstone in Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, fig. 12.
46. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 156–157.
47. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 92.
48. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 82.
49. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 150.
50. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a12.
51. In late imperial China there were six ministries (*liubu*), or boards: Administration, Finance, Rites, War, Punishments, Public Works. Each board was headed by a minister, or president (*butang*), who was served by a number of vice ministers (*shilang*).
52. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
53. Lu You, “Lu xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a1.
54. Ibid.
55. This is an allusion to the universal refrain of the Song Neo-Confucian scholar Lu Xiangshan: “Human beings share the same mind, and their mind shares the same Principle.”
56. That is, Daoism and Buddhism, from an orthodox Confucian perspective. Lu You, “Lu xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*.
57. Ibid., p. a1.
58. Ibid., p. a2.
59. Ibid.
60. Ibid. The line “as if it were right there in front of them” contains an oblique reference to the *Lunyu*, in which it is written:

The Master is good at drawing me forward a step at a time; he broadens with culture and disciplines my behavior through the observance of ritual propriety. Even if I wanted to quit, I could not. And when I have exhausted my abilities, it is as though something rises up *right in front of me* and even though I want to follow it, there is no road to take. (Ames and Rosemont, *Analects of Confucius*, pp. 128–129)

The allusion is hinted at only by a couple of shared turns of phrase. However, I think the meaning, based on a contextual comparison, is evident. Like Confucius’ disciple Yan Yuan, Lu You also spoke of the broadening effect of literary culture and the centrality of ritual in a disciplined life, both of which he found in Liu Zhi’s book.

61. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
62. Xu Zhuo, “Xu xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, pp. a3–4.
63. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
64. Jing Rizhen, “Yizhai xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a5.

65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid., p. a6.
68. Xu Yuanzheng was a *jinshi* and vice minister of the Board of Rites like his father Xu Zhuo, writer of a preface to the *Tianfang dianli* cited above. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 119.
69. Xu Yuanzheng, “Xu xu (ii),” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang xingli*, p. 4a.
70. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 84.
71. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a11.
72. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 84.
73. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b3.
74. For this reason, my own translations of *jing* are necessarily sensitive to the specific instances in which it is used, leading to alternation between the rendering “classic” and “scripture” when the term appears.
75. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b3.
76. Ibid.
77. This juxtaposition of goodness (or benevolence) and wisdom is an allusion to a passage from the *Lunyu*: “The Master said: ‘The wise man delights in water; the Good man delights in mountains. For the wise move; but the Good stay still. The wise are happy; but the Good, secure’” (Waley, *The Analects*, p. 120, VI:xxi).
78. Lu You, “Lu xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a2.
79. Xu Zhuo, “Xu xu,” in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a3–4.
80. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. b2–3.
81. Literally “masters,” but here meaning “philosophers.”
82. Literally “collected,” but here meaning “miscellaneous.”
83. R. Kent Guy, *The Emperor’s Four Treasuries: Scholars and the State in the Late Ch’ien-lung Era*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 129, Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 1, 157–159.
84. Ibid., p. 104.
85. Ibid., p. 109.
86. Ibid., p. 108.
87. Ibid.
88. *Ch’in-ting Ssu-ku Ch’üan-shu Tsong-mu T’i-yao*, entry 05593.
89. The negative perception of Islam expressed in the *Siku quanshu* entry was probably fostered by poor relations between Muslims and the Qing government in northwestern China and Xinjiang. In the 1780s, at the time when the *Siku quanshu* was compiled, Gansu Muslims rebelled several times against the government (see Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 108–111). The Qianlong reign also saw the conquest of Xinjiang, bringing many non-Chinese Muslims unwillingly under Qing rule. These conditions led to a rash of Muslim (both Hui and non-Chinese) rebellions against the dynasty in the nineteenth century.
90. Liu Zhi, “Zhushu shu,” in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 360.

CHAPTER 3: LIU ZHI'S CONCEPTS AND TERMINOLOGY

1. Tianfang is an ancient Chinese name for the Ka'ba, the cube-like structure at the heart of the sacred shrine at Mecca, also called Bayt-Allāh, the "House of God," to which all Muslims around the world turn in daily worship. The Ka'ba is the religious and spiritual heart of Islam, making Mecca, and by extension Arabia, the nexus of the Muslim world. Literally "Celestial Square" in Chinese, Tianfang has come to be applied more generally to Arabia (e.g., the Chinese translation of *The Arabian Nights* is called *Tianfang yetan*). It was poetically adopted by the Han Kitāb authors to refer to anything associated with Arabia, and by extension to the foundations of Islam.
2. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 147.
3. Ibid.
4. Liu Zhi, "Zhushu shu," in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 357.
5. Liu Zhi, "Liyān," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b1.
6. Ibid.
7. Liu Zhi, "Zhushu shu," in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 357.
8. The earliest literary appearance of the literal meaning of "path" or "road" is traced to the *Shijing* (Book of Songs), *Xiaoya*, "Da Dong" (Minor Odes, "The Greater East"): "The roads of Zhou are smooth like a whetstone, and straight as an arrow" (*Ciyuan*, 3073.1, p. 222). From this literal meaning of a physical path came the connotation of a "way" in the abstract sense, as expressed by Confucius: "Wealth and honor are what people want, but if they are the consequence of deviating from the way, I would have no part of them" (Ames and Rosemont, *Analects of Confucius*, p. 90, 4.5).

The word was widely used by the philosophers of the various ancient schools of thought in this general sense of the single Way that all things are to follow. Yet even this universal sense was rich in nuance, with two related main interpretations: *Dao* as "the Way" could mean the "natural law" by which the cosmos is governed, as well as the pattern of human ethical and moral behavior prescribed by the sages for the harmonious conduct of society. In the first sense, the *dao* is often modified as *tiandao*, the "Way of Heaven," or *didao*, the "Way of Earth." This sense of the Way as the underlying, unseen power both beyond and in the phenomenal world is often associated with the philosophy of Daoism, and is whence the tradition gets its name.

The understanding of the *dao* as the Way of Heaven is also recognized by the Confucian tradition, even though Confucius himself refrained from speaking to his disciples in detail about its mysteries (see *Lunyu*, V.12). For Confucius, the *dao* was "only the proper course of human conduct and of organization of government, which is the Way of 'antiquity', of 'the former kings', of 'the gentlemen', of 'the good man' and of 'Wen and Wu' the founders of Chou, or else of what someone teaches as the Way ('my Way', and 'our master's Way')'" (A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China* [La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1989], p. 13). Confucius did not use the term,

- “as Confucians as well as Taoists soon came to do, of the course of the natural world outside man” (ibid.). Thus so-called “primitive Confucianism” was more concerned with the second sense of the *dao* as the ultimate standard of human conduct, social norms, and cultural conventions. This usage is frequently associated with the compound *rendao*, the “Way of Man.”
9. One of the other terms used especially in Neo-Confucianism to refer to the absolute, *li*, is also used in a universal sense and a generic sense, as “Principle” and “principle” respectively. In its capitalized sense, especially within the Neo-Confucian tradition, *li* is identified with *dao*, both being referents for the absolute. The Song dynasty scholar Chen Chun (1159–1223) described the relationship between the two concepts: “The Way is that which can be followed forever, and Principle is that which is forever unchanging” (Chen Chun, *Neo-Confucian Terms Explained (Pei-hsi tzu-i)*, trans. Wing-tsit Chan [New York: Columbia, 1986], p. 112).
 10. It is important to note that among the Song-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophers, who effected the great synthesis of early Confucian ethical philosophy with the metaphysical traditions of Buddhism and Daoism, the definition and usage of these and other terms was fluid, overlapping, and sometimes interchangeable. These thinkers did not always use this terminology in the same way, and they debated the specific meanings of and relationships between specific words and concepts. Zhu Xi (1130–1200), a powerful voice for the standardization of terminology and concepts within Neo-Confucianism, stated, “The Great Ultimate is nothing other than principle” (Chan, *Source Book*, p. 638) and that “Principle refers to the Way” (ibid., p. 636), thus allowing for the conflation of these concepts. He also indicated, like many of his fellow Neo-Confucians, that ancient anthropomorphic references to divinity, such as heaven or Shangdi, were to be understood as metaphors for the operation of Principle (ibid., p. 636), so that all figurations of the absolute reality, whether personal or abstract, could be subsumed under a single category.
 11. Yoshiro Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China* (Tokyo: Maruzen, 1937), pt. I, p. 57.
 12. Ibid., pt. IV, p. 78.
 13. William Charles White, *Chinese Jews*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1966), pt. II, p. 9. Lipman has: “His Way of honoring Heaven and ritual worship revealed the mysteries of the ancestral Dao” (Jonathan Lipman, “Living Judaism in Confucian Culture: Being Jewish and Being Chinese,” in Lawrence Fine, ed., *Judaism in Practice* [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001], p. 273).
 14. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 43, 52.
 15. Ibid.
 16. Ibid.
 17. Matteo Ricci, S.J. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven T'ien-chu Shi-i*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), pp. 64–65.

18. That is, the “primitive Confucianism” of Confucius and his immediate followers, free from the Buddhist and Daoist accretions that Ricci believed had corrupted the teachings of Neo-Confucianism.
19. Ricci, *True Meaning*, pp. 130–131.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139.
21. Cited in Nicholas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998), p. 201, cited in Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 166.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 171.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 181.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
28. *Ibid.*
29. Lipman, “Living Judaism,” p. 267.
30. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 51.
31. In the 1663 inscription at the Kaifeng synagogue, for example, a non-Jewish Confucian literatus, Liu Chang, mentioned two texts: *Shengjing jibian* (A Record of the Vicissitudes of the Holy Scriptures) by Zhao Yingcheng, and *Mingdao xu* (A Preface to the Illustrious Way) by Zhao Yingdou (see White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 66, 84). However, neither of these nor any other is extant.
32. Literary accomplishment also constituted an important aspect of the Chinese Buddhist tradition, yet Buddhists were always perceived and/or portrayed as heterodox by the Confucian arbiters of orthodoxy. So it is more than simply producing texts that helped Muslims align themselves with the Confucian tradition. It was also the style and content of these texts, not to mention that their authors identified themselves as literati who embraced the essential social and cultural values of Confucianism, that facilitated this alignment.
33. Ricci claimed to have found a Chinese community that apparently retained vestigial traces of Christian practice, whom he supposed to be Nestorian descendants, but they were scarcely aware of their own religious heritage and certainly did not produce any Christian scholarship or literature in Chinese. (See Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* [New York: Penguin, 2002], p. 119.)
34. Ma Zhu, “Zi xu” (Author’s Preface), in *Qingzhen zhinan*, p. 15.
35. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 10.
36. The use of the term *jiao* to refer to education, in the form of moral instruction, is well established in classical Chinese sources. The *Ciyuan* cites a passage in *Mencius* as its *locus classicus*: “Human beings may be well-fed, warmly clothed and comfortably housed, but if they have no instruction, then they are little better than the birds and beasts” (*Mengzi* [Mencius], “Teng Wen gong, shang” [Duke Wen of Teng, Part One], quoted in *Ciyuan*, 1343.2, p. 251).

37. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 8.
38. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4.
39. *Ibid.*, p.3.
40. Interestingly, in northwestern China, where there are highly concentrated pockets of Muslims, local non-Muslims often refer to Islam as *xiaojiao* (“small teaching”) in contrast to the *dajiao* of Confucianism. While this reflects the relative size of the Han and Hui populations of the region, the fact that Muslims do not also adopt this appellation for their faith reflect the fact that *xiaojiao* is also a pejorative term that belittles Islam as a “lesser teaching.”
41. Ding Peng, a native of Hangzhou, was a Chinese Muslim scholar-official (a *jinshi* of 1655, who rose to the rank of *fengzhi daifu* [i.e., 5th grade, 1st rank]). He was a noted poet and composed a stele inscription for a mosque in Hangzhou, dated 1670 (Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, pp. 81–82). Liu Zhi lists his hometown as Jiyang, which Leslie identifies as a city in Shandong Province (Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 81). While there is also a Jiyang in Henan Province, the fact that one of Ding Peng’s official posts was in Henan, with others in Guangdong Province and in Beijing (Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 82), indicates that he likely came from the Jiyang in Shandong, because of the “rule of exclusion” which forbade Qing officials from serving in their home provinces.
42. This undated essay was originally published as a preface “to a work now lost,” but was preserved in versions of both Liu Zhi’s *Tianfang dianli* and *Tianfang zhisheng shilu*. Leslie speculates that “this preface is almost certainly earlier than 1655” on the grounds that Ding Peng is not yet referred to by the title *jinshi*, a degree he earned in that year (Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 21).
43. Ding Peng, “*Tianfang sheng xu*,” in Bai, ed. *Huizu renwu zhi (Qingdai)*, p. 237; quoted in Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 13.
44. *Ibid.*
45. It was not only Muslim literati who used the Confucian canon in this way. Chinese Jews and Christians made similar choices, sometimes even emphasizing the Confucian tradition over and above their native faiths. For example, Jin Zhong, the Jewish literatus who wrote the 1489 inscription at the Kaifeng synagogue, alluded to the *Yijing* and *Lunyu* to make his text intellectually viable, without a single citation of any Jewish text (see Lipman, “Living Judaism,” p. 266).
46. See Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 38.
47. In the late twelfth century, Zhu Xi played a key role in elevating the status of both the *Daxue* and *Zhongyong* by publishing them in 1190 together with the *Lunyu* and *Mengzi* and classifying these “Four Books” as the heart of the Confucian canon, the embodiment of the “essence of the Way” (see Daniel K. Gardner, *Chu Hsi and the Ta-hsueh: Neo-Confucian Reflection on the Confucian Canon*, Harvard East Asian Monographs 118 [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986], p. 3).
48. Chan, *Source Book*, p. 95.

49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 96.
51. *Zhongyong*, I.1.
52. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, eds. *Sources of Chinese Tradition: From the Earliest Times to 1600*, vol. 1, 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), p. 793.
53. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 42 (translation); p. 51 (original Chinese text).
54. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 53 (original Chinese text). I have rendered it in English here to reflect my translation of the line from the *Zhongyong* above (White's translation appears in *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 45).
55. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 151.
56. Ibid., p. 152.
57. Lipman, "Living Judaism," p. 268.
58. Ibid.
59. Ricci, *True Meaning*, p. 408.
60. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 13.
61. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 21.
62. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 9.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid.
65. The earliest literary use of the term to refer to a method, law, or "moral standard" (*fadu*) appears in the *Zhouli* (The Rites of Zhou), thus linking the concepts of law and ritual (*Ciyuan*, p. 1748).
66. *Daxue*, IX:8, translated in Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, p. 113.
67. *Zhongyong*, XXIX:5.
68. Cf. Mencius, "Gongsun chou, Pt. I," I:7; "Teng Wen gong, Pt. I," III.11.
69. Ibid., "Li lou, Pt. I," I:1.8.
70. Ibid., "Jin xin, Pt. II, XXXIII.
71. *Daodejing*, ch. XXV.
72. Daoist thinkers have made a practice of redefining terms, sometimes even turning their conventional meanings upside down. Thus the author of the *Daodejing* was clearly aware of the standard sense of the word *fa* as "law," but ironically cited it as a cause of crime: "the more laws and edicts are propagated, the more thieves and robbers there are" (ibid., ch. LVII).
73. See Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 273.
74. In fact, Buddhism came to be known, among many other designations, as *fajia* (lit. "The teaching of the law"), a name previously held exclusively by the Legalist school (William Edward Soothill and Lewis Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms (with Sanskrit and English Equivalents and a Sanskrit-Pali Index)* [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937]).
75. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 84.

76. This tripartite arrangement is also reflected in Sufi understanding of “the Sunnah—which means precisely the ‘exemplary model’ (= *fa*) of the Prophet—[and] is often said to have three dimensions, corresponding to the Prophet’s bodily activity (Shariah), his moral and spiritual qualities (Tariqah), and his inner reality (Haqiqah). So . . . ‘emulation’ of the Prophet is exactly what Liu meant, that is, emulation on all three levels.” (Sachiko Murata, William C. Chittick, and Tu Weiming, *The Sage Learning of Liu Zhi: Islamic Thought in Confucian Terms* [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009], p. 156 n. 26).
77. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.

Liu Zhi’s use of the word “vehicle” clearly resonates with the Buddhist notion of the hierarchical progression from the “lesser vehicle” (*hīnayāna*, Ch. *xiaosheng*) to the “greater vehicle” (*mahāyāna*, Ch. *dasheng*). Of course, the use of the term *hīnayāna* reflects a Mahāyāna prejudice. Adherents of the earlier Buddhist tradition prefer the term Theravāda (“teaching of the elders” or “ancient teaching”), which is also the more common term among western Buddhologists nowadays. From the context we might suppose that Liu Zhi was using the idea of the “vehicle” to correspond with the Arabic *maqām* (lit. “station”), a term frequently used in Sufi discourse to refer to the “stages” of spiritual development.
78. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.
79. Ibid.
80. The Chinese term Liu Zhi uses is *dao*, by which he clearly meant to associate the specific course of Islamic mystical progress to the universal Way of Chinese thought. In this context, the mystic path (or Way) of Sufism (*tarīqa*) is actually seen as an aspect, or expression, of the universal Way.
81. The notion of “probing Principle and completing Nature” is an allusion to the *Yijing*, which refers to these as two steps of a process of reaching one’s true destiny. The idea of “completing Nature” is repeated in the *Zhongyong*: “Only with the utmost sincerity under Heaven is one able to complete one’s Nature” (ch. XXII). Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.
82. *Wuwo* (lit. “no-self”) is a term borrowed from Chinese Buddhist discourse, a translation of the Sanskrit *ānātman*, defined as “no ego, no soul (of an independent and self-contained character), impersonal, no individual independent existence.” (Soothill and Hodous, *Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, p. 379.) Whereas *ānātman* is generally used to refer to sentient beings, a related term, *ānātmaka*, refers to the same lack of permanent, independent selfhood in non-sentient beings and is represented in Chinese by the term *wuwu* (“no-thing”). Both of these Chinese compounds include the first character *wu*, meaning “without” or “non,” well suited as a translation of the Sanskrit prefix *ān-*. This Chinese character is also strongly associated with the “world-negating” language of Daoism (as in the concept of *wuwei*, or “non-action”), whence it was originally borrowed by early exponents of Buddhism in China.

These two terms, co-opted directly from Chinese Buddhism and bearing Daoist traces, resonate with the Sufi idea that no one and nothing inherently possesses individual,

independent existence except God. Accordingly, in the Sufi tradition, the penultimate goal of the mystic path is the experiential realization of this ontological truth and the concomitant annihilation (Ar. *fanā'*) of the ego, followed by the ultimate state of subsumption (Ar. *baqā'*) in the pure being of God. Therefore, despite an obvious resonance with Buddhist and Daoist concepts, we need not look beyond the Islamic tradition for precedents to Liu Zhi's thought on these matters. The idea that the creation possesses no independent existence apart from the creator is central to the doctrines of Ibn al-'Arabī and some of his commentators, who inherited it from classic Ash'arite philosophy. Thus the Sufism of the period would have argued something similar to what we read in the *Tianfang dianli*.

83. *Keji*, "restraining the self," is a concept common to China's Three Teachings. Here it is correlated with the Islamic notion of *al-jihād al-akbar* (lit. "the greatest struggle"), which, according to a prophetic teaching, refers to the effort to control one's selfish desires by waging a "holy war" against the lower soul (i.e., *nafs*).
84. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.
85. Ibid.
86. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4.
87. 25:1.
88. *Furqān* came to mean "revealed scripture" in the Han Kitāb texts. The idea of scriptures, or classics, being sent down by a deity is unknown in the Confucian tradition, though it does have analogs in the later Daoist tradition, which probably inherited the concept from Buddhism. Thus *furqān* approximated in the Buddhist sense of *dharmā*, which as we have seen was also translated into Chinese as *fa*. It was a conceptual challenge for the Han Kitāb writers (and other Abrahamic apologists in China) to persuade a Confucian audience that their God might actually be the author of texts. Liu Zhi and his colleagues responded to this challenge by invoking the Chinese understanding of Buddha (both as a man and divine being), who did in fact reveal texts to humankind.
89. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4.
90. Jing Rifan, "Yizhai shuxu," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a5.
91. Laurence G. Thompson, *Chinese Religion: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1989), p. 107.
92. Liu Zhi, "Zi xu," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a11.
93. The literal loss of poetry in Liu Zhi's rendering of Islamic thought into Chinese is documented in his translation of Jāmī's *Lawā'ih*, from which he dropped almost all the poetic verses from the original Persian. As Murata writes, "Liu Chih is interested only in philosophical and metaphysical issues, and with two or three exceptions, he makes no attempt to translate the poems. Hence the Chinese text keeps the high level of discourse throughout, and readers have no opportunity to refresh themselves with poetic diversions" (Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 122).
94. This model is similarly expressed in the Jewish Kabbalah, where the unconditioned and

- infinite Ayn Sof, God as pure being (or alternatively non-being), generates the ten *sefirot*, or “emanations,” which represent incremental steps to the phenomenal reality of creation.
95. Ch. XLII.
 96. Shangdi, which literally means something like “the emperor above,” is depicted in the ancient literature as divine sovereign (though not explicitly a creator) whose will controls the fate of Heaven and Earth. Shangdi rewards and punishes, communicates verbally, and may be propitiated by worship. Jews, Muslims, Christian missionaries, and early Western sinologists, seizing upon similarities between Shangdi and the biblical/Qur’ānic supreme being, identified Yahweh/Allah with the ancient Chinese deity, leading to translations of Shangdi into English as “the Lord on High” or simply “God.” In Chinese sources, Shangdi is sometimes abbreviated as *di*, rendered as “Lord” or “God” in English translations. Wishing to avoid this presumption of identity, I have opted not to translate either Shangdi or *di*.
 97. Ode 241, “Sovereign Might” (*Huangyi*), in Arthur Waley, trans., *The Book of Songs: The Ancient Chinese Classic of Poetry* (New York: Grove, 1996), p. 238.
 98. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 208, 17.19.
 99. Cf. 6:95–99; 10:5–6; 30:20–27; 45:3–6; 51:20–23; 88:17–20; 89:1–5.
 100. See, e.g., Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 28.
 101. *Mencius*, “*Wan zhang*, Pt. 1,” ch. 5.
 102. *Ibid.*, “*Gao zi*, Pt. 1,” ch. 7.
 103. 25:20.
 104. 17:93.
 105. 18:110.
 106. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 9. Liu Zhi’s “nine ranks” include at the top the four classes of sages, which he discussed in greater detail earlier in the chapter (“Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4). The remaining five ranks of humanity are: the “great worthies” (“those who preserve the etiquette of the Sages, but do not attain to their high station”); the “intelligentsia” (“those who clearly discern the ten thousand principles without omitting even one”); the “upright” (those who follow the example of the sages and worthies, and who are not polluted by any worldly vice); the “good people” (those who revere and uphold the received tradition and who do not omit a single practice); and “the ordinary folk” (also called the “faithful”).
 107. 2:285.
 108. *Mencius*, “*Wan zhang*, Pt. 1,” ch. 7.
 109. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. 3–4. Liu Zhi went into detail, describing the differences between the various classes of sages, and giving examples from each rank:

All of those who received the mandate to implement and promulgate the Teaching, and had signs and proofs are, without exception, considered sages. For example, Saul and Joshua were this kind of sage. Those who received the mandate and promulgated the Teaching, and had signs and divine orders to

regulate the decree, are called by the title “reverend” sage, like Seth, Jacob, and Solomon. Those who received the mandate to promulgate the Teaching, ordered by the classics, but who could adjust their messages to suit different conditions according to time and place, adding to or subtracting from the texts of the earlier sages, are called the “great sages,” like Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus. He who received the mandate to promulgate the Teaching, upheld and received the great tradition, but totally reformed the classics of previous sages in order to set the standard for ten thousand generations to follow, is called the “ultimate sage” (or “most holy”). This is only the single individual, Muḥammad, and none other. The Way of Heaven was thus transmitted from one generation to the next.

It is not clear from the text whence Liu Zhi derived his four-tiered system of classification. Islamic doctrine divides the prophets into two classes, distinguished by the scope and nature of their mission. *Nabī* is the generic word in Arabic for “prophet,” and refers to all individuals sent by God to warn and/or bring good tidings to humankind. This class seems to correspond with Liu Zhi’s first two categories above, the ranks of (ordinary) sages and “reverend sages” combined. Within this general category of prophet (i.e., *nabī*) exists a smaller subset made up of individuals called *rasūl*, which literally means “one who is sent” and is most often translated as “messenger” (or sometimes as “apostle” or “envoy”). This term refers specifically to a prophet who brings a new revelation, usually in the form of a book, which supersedes the previous revelation(s). *Rasūl* would, therefore, seem to correspond with Liu Zhi’s final two categories combined, including the “great sages” and the “ultimate sage,” Muḥammad. According to Islamic tradition, God has sent more than 124,000 prophets (including those considered *rasūl*) throughout history. Only twenty-five of them are named in the Qur’ān, however.

110. 68:4.

111. 33:21.

112. Ch. XXII.

113. Chan, *Source Book*, p. 761.

114. See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 272. Shao Kangjie’s characterization of the sage as the *renji*, or “ultimate of man,” is also reminiscent of the figure of the *qutb*, described as the “virtual center of spiritual energy upon whom the well-being of this world depends” (ibid., p. 200). The word *qutb* literally means “pole” or “axis” in Arabic, hence the idea that the world revolves around him and he acts as the conduit of God’s power and love, connecting the divine and material realms. The Chinese word *ji* also means “pole” or “beam” and so *renji* also means the “human axis.”

115. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p.11.

116. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 81, 2.24.

117. Ellen Neskari, “Shrines to Local Former Worthies,” in Donald S. Lopez Jr., ed. *Religions of China in Practice* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 293.

118. Thompson, *Chinese Religion*, p. 83.

119. As words attributed to the Buddha in the *Lalitavistara sutra* affirm:

When I was born, the three thousand worlds were shaken: the great gods
Shakra and Brahma, the *Asuras*, the *Mahoragas*, Chandra [Moon] and Surya
[Sun], as well as Vaisravana and Kumara, all bowed their heads at my feet
and did homage to me. What god is so distinguished by his superiority over
me? I am the god above the gods, superior to all the gods; no god is like me—
how could there be a higher?

120. Thompson, *Chinese Religion*, p. 117.

121. Richard H. Robinson and Willard L. Johnson, *The Buddhist Religion: A Historical Introduction* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth, 1982), p. 155.

122. White renders it “Holy Patriarch Moses,” translating *sheng* as an adjective rather than a noun (White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 58, 62, 66).

123. Or, again, as White renders it, “holy scriptures” (White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 66).

124. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, p. 58, 80.

125. Ibid.

126. Ibid., pp. 66, 84.

127. The Nestorian usage is sometimes ambiguous, as in this line from the Xi’an stele inscription: “the Sage is the embodiment of the Origin” (Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents*, pt. I, p. 62, Chinese text, p. 78). This may be an effect of Christian theology and the doctrine of the divine incarnation, which elevates Christ to a superhuman status that is not consistent with the Chinese concept of the sage.

128. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 165.

129. Standaert, *Yang Tingyun*, p. 201.

130. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 167.

131. Cf. Muḥammad’s epithet, *Khātim al-Nabīyīn*, the “Seal of the Prophets,” found in Qur’ān 33:40. Liu Zhi uses this Arabic term transliterated in Chinese as *Hating*, which he defines as “seal” (*yin*) (“Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p.4).

132. See Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 171, 184.

133. The phrase Liu Zhi used most frequently in reference to the sages is that they “received the mandate” (*shou ming*), indicating a kind of divine dispensation, though not necessarily revelation per se. Chinese classics and historiography are replete with references, employing the same phraseology, to Chinese rulers and sages experiencing *shou ming*, or “receiving the mandate” of Heaven. Liu Zhi’s application of this phrase to Muḥammad and other Qur’ānic prophets reinforced the harmonization of Chinese and Islamic concepts. However, in the same chapter Liu Zhi conveyed the idea of revealed scripture, a concept alien to the Confucian tradition, as he wrote of “classics that the true Lord sent down to the previous sages” (“Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 4).

134. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 171.
135. In their selective omission of elements, such as the Crucifixion, the Jesuits retraced the steps of the Nestorian predecessors in China, from whose texts the Passion of Christ is similarly absent.
136. Zhang Zhong, “Xu,” in *Kelimo jie* (Explication of Kalām), in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 213.
137. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 172.
138. 68:4.
139. 33:21.
140. Cf. *Daxue* IX:8 and *Zhongyong* XXIX:5.
141. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.
142. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
143. The *Jilu huibian* is a book edited by the Ming dynasty scholar Shen Jiefu, a native of Wucheng (present-day Huzhou), Jiangsu Province, a *jinshi* of the Jiajing reign (1522–1567), and a vice minister at the Board of Works. This book contained collected writings of assorted pre-Jiajing-era scholars, totaling 123 types. It consisted mainly of records of various Chinese reigns but also included miscellaneous materials, such as sections on foreign nations. It was printed in 1617 by Chen Yuting (*Cihai*, p. 3015).
144. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 12.

CHAPTER 4: RITUAL AS AN EXPRESSION OF CHINESE-ISLAMIC SIMULTANEITY

1. Liu Zhi, “Zhushu shu,” in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi* (*Qingdai*), p. 357.
2. Isaac Mason, who translated a portion of the book in 1921, confirmed that it was widely known amongst the Muslims he encountered and questioned in various parts of China in the early twentieth century (Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 152).
3. Liu Zhi knew that a thorough examination of the person, life, and role of the Prophet was something that Chinese Muslims sorely lacked, and he saw it as a mission to fill this lacuna. He had attempted to do so in earlier drafts, with which neither he nor his colleagues were satisfied. It wasn’t until he “discovered” a Persian translation of al-Kāzarūnī’s original biography, called *Tarjuma-i-Mawlūd-i-Muṣṭafā*, that Liu Zhi found the source he needed to fulfill his aspiration, leading to the longest of all his books. He characterized the discovery of the manuscript as an act of Providence and saw it as a sign of divine approval of his work (Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 151–152).
4. Leslie, *Islamic Literature*, p. 50.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 26.
7. Ford, “Some Chinese Muslims,” pp. 149, 151.
8. Forbes, “Liu Chih,” in M. Th. Houtsma et al., ed., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. vol. 5 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), pp. 770–771.

9. The book's widespread appeal among Chinese Muslims has apparently also influenced later non-Chinese scholars of Liu Zhi and Han Kitāb literature. The *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* has captured the attention of researchers and "is the only long Chinese work on Islam to have been studied by modern scholars; it was partly translated into English in 1921, and also into Russian, French, and Japanese" (Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 26).
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Xu Zhuo, "Xu xu," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a3.
13. Ibid.
14. "Ritual," or "propriety," is one of the most important concepts in all of the Confucian tradition. It is counted as one of the guiding principles for the Confucian program of individual cultivation and societal edification and as a cardinal virtue to which to aspire. As such, it is considered one of the five constants (*wuchang*): humanity/benevolence (*ren*); righteousness/justice (*yi*); ritual/propriety (*li*); wisdom/knowledge (*zhi*); and faithfulness/sincerity (*xin*).
15. Ibid.
16. Confucius, *Lunyu*, VII:17.
17. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 11.
18. Ibid.
19. Confucius, *Lunyu*, XII:1. In a discussion of the requirements of the Fast of Ramaḍān, Liu Zhi echoed this Confucian perspective: "So that his heart and mind are conscientious in their considerations, he must comply with the Way. So that his hands and feet are careful in their movements, he must comply with ritual" ("Zhaijie pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 72).
20. Confucius, *Lunyu*, VI:25.
21. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 15.
22. Mencius, "*Jin xin*," pt. II, 12:2.
23. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 18.
24. Mencius, "*Gongsun chou*," pt. I, II:27.
25. James L. Watson, "Rites or Beliefs? The Construction of a Unified Culture in Late Imperial China," in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds. *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 94.
26. C. K. Yang, *Religion in Chinese Society: A Study of Contemporary Social Functions of Religion and Some of Their Historical Factors* (Prospect Hills, Ill.: Waveland, 1961), p. 193.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.
29. *Liji*, Book One, I.1, quoted in Thompson, *Chinese Religion*, p. 40.
30. James L. Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance," in James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 3.

31. Watson, “Rites or Beliefs?” p. 99.
32. We are reminded in this context that even in the twelfth century, when the Neo-Confucian scholar Zhu Xi returned to his native Fujian to serve as a prefect, one of the things he tried to do was reform local marriage customs, reviving what he considered to be orthopraxy. So this attempt to enforce rituals and thereby promote cultural unity and social cohesion predates the late imperial era considerably, even as its legacy has carried over into modern analysis.
33. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites,” p. 17.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.
35. Watson, “Rites or Beliefs?” p. 87.
36. These six ministries, or boards, (*liubu*) were the Board of Administration (aka the Civil Office, *libu*), the Board of Finance/Revenue (*hubu*), Board of Rites (*libu*), Board of War (*bingbu*), Punishments (*xingbu*), and Board of Public Works (*gongbu*). Each board was headed by a minister, or president (*butang*), who was assisted by five assistant ministers, or vice presidents of the board (*shilang*), so that among the six boards, there were thirty-six ministers in total.
37. Susan Naquin reports on the diversity of practices concerned with death and burial among various Muslim communities. As expected, she writes that the Muslims of northwest and Central Asia shared the least number of customs with their non-Muslim neighbors. As we move further toward the heart of Chinese culture in the central and eastern parts of the country, local Muslim communities show greater signs of ritual assimilation (Susan Naquin, “Funerals in North China: Uniformity and Variation,” in James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], p. 50).
38. See Liu Zhi, “Sangzang pian” and “Fusi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. 219–238.
39. Liu Zhi, “Fusi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. 236–237.
40. The Jesuits’ application of the concept of primitive Confucianism as a manifestation of “natural religion” that “prefigures” Christianity is discussed in chapter 6, in which we explore precedents to Liu Zhi’s search for suitable nomenclature for Allah in Chinese.
41. Daoist and Buddhist rituals constituted much of the elite religious practice depicted in Cao Xueqin’s *Honglou meng* (Dream of the Red Chamber), for example. Moreover, their elite, professional practitioners formed a part of the social nexus of the highly elite Jia family, who, although fictional, certainly reflected realities of mid-eighteenth-century Qing dynasty society. The lower-level elite life of roughly the same period portrayed by Shen Fu in *Fusheng liuji* (Six Records of a Floating Life) also included quite a bit of non-Confucian practice.
42. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. a11–12.
43. Liu Zhi, “Hunyin pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 211.
44. *Ibid.*
45. Watson, “The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites,” p. 4.

46. Xu Zhuo, "Xu xu," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. a3.
47. Liu Zhi, "Zi xu," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 12.
48. The *Liji* says, "The power which the rituals have of transforming by instruction is not on the surface. They put a stop to evil before it takes form. They cause men day by day to travel toward the good and leave wrongdoing far behind" (*Book of Rites* II, quoted in Yu-wei Hsieh, "Filial Piety and Chinese Society," in Charles A. Moore, ed., *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture*, p. 183 [Honolulu: East-West Center Press, University of Hawai'i Press, 1967]). Confucius also spoke frequently of the role of ritual in establishing one's character (see, e.g., *Lunyu*, VIII:8, XVI:13, XX:3).
49. Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites," p. 3.
50. Evelyn S. Rawski, "A Historian's Approach to Chinese Death Ritual," in James L. Watson and Evelyn S. Rawski, eds. *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 31. In the twelfth century, Zhu Xi composed the *Jiali* (Family Ritual). Later, a "great many other ritual manuals, many of them illustrated, borrowed the prestige of Chu Hsi's name and the 'Rituals of Family Life' title" and "books of this sort were basic reference manuals for the elite" (Naquin, "Funerals in North China," p. 63).
51. Liu Zhi "Zi xu," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b12.
52. Ding Chenglong, "Ba," in Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, p. 239. I have translated *jing* here as "scriptures" rather than "classics" because from the context it is clear that Ding Chenglong is referring to Islamic texts rather than Chinese ones.
53. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 8.
54. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 38.
55. Sachiko Murata and William C. Chittick, *The Vision of Islam* (St. Paul, Minn.: Paragon House, 1994), p. 306.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid.
58. Ibid.
59. Not surprisingly, the term *li* is used identically in Chinese where the adjective *youli* (lit. "has ritual"), commonly translated as "polite," also connotes urbaneness, refinement, and genteelness.
60. Ibid.
61. *Ādāb* also lent its name to a genre of literature devoted to the specific codes of practice for various professions (e.g., the "proper procedures" to be followed by scholars, bureaucrats, military officers, physicians, jurists, etc.). Furthermore, in the realm of literature, quite apart from the technical usages just mentioned, the term *ādāb* was also "applied to belles lettres, especially poetry," a carryover from its colloquial connotations of refinement and sophistication (Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, p. 306).
62. Ibid., p. 307.
63. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Ṭabaqāt al-Sūfiyya* (Generations of Sufis), ed. Johannes

- Pederson (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1960), p. 119, quoted in Qamar-ul Huda, “Light Beyond the Shore in the Theology of Proper Sufi Moral Conduct (*Adab*),” *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 72.21 (June 2004): p. 463.
64. Huda, “Light Beyond the Shore,” p. 462.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 463.
66. *Ibid.*
67. al-Suhrawardī, *‘Awārif al-Ma‘ārif*, quoted in Huda, “Light Beyond the Shore,” p. 461.
68. After the ninth and tenth centuries, systematic consolidation of the body of Ḥadīth literature had provided the early *‘ulamā’* with a rich source of content for legal reasoning. As the religious science of *fiqh*, or jurisprudence, became an increasingly important field of scholarly inquiry throughout the Muslim world, the various Sunni schools of law emerged, giving rise to generations of scholars who composed and compiled lengthy works establishing their specific methodologies of legal reasoning. From an early point in its development, *fiqh* became highly theoretical, employing hypothetical cases for the purposes of sharpening legal argumentation. Legal scholars applied their methodologies to obscure, often unlikely, scenarios to prove their ability to arrive at a ruling in virtually any case. In the process, however, their theories became extremely complicated and largely inaccessible to laymen.
69. Yahyā ibn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Nawawī, *Al-Maqāṣid: Imam Nawawī’s Manual of Islam*, trans. Noah Ha Mim Keller (Evanston, Ill.: Sunna Books, 1994), p. viii.
70. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
71. *Ibid.*, p. x.
72. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b11.
73. This theoretical portion of the book includes the chapters “Yuanjiao pian” (The Original Teaching), “Zhenzai pian” (The True Lord), “Renshi pian” (Recognition), and “Tiyann pian” (Pronouncement) (see *Tianfang dianli*, *juan* 1–4, pp. 1–40).
74. See Liu Zhi, *Tianfang dianli*, *juan* 5–9, pp. 41–106.
75. The word Liu Zhi uses in place of “pillar” is *gong*, which has a number of connotations in the Chinese tradition. Its conventional meaning is that of “merit, achievement, efficacy, or good result.” It can also mean “diligent effort” whereby one achieves merit or good results. Among the Confucian elite, it was primarily used to describe civil or moral duties, especially those that increased one’s rank and honor. In Buddhism, it refers to the acts of karmic merit that lead to higher rebirth, especially in one of Buddhism’s paradises, and ultimately to the attainment of Nirvana.
76. Liu Zhi, “Wugong yi: Wugong zonggang,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 41.
77. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
78. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. a12.
79. Liu Zhi, “Wugong yi: Wugong zonggang,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 41.
80. See *Tianfang dianli*, *juan* 10–13, pp. 107–150.
81. Liu Zhi, “Wudian yi: Wudian zonggang,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 107.

82. Ibid., p. 110.
83. Nabih Amin Faris, *The Book of Knowledge: Being a Translation with Notes of the Kitāb al-‘Ilm of al-Ghazzālī’s Ihya’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1991) p. 3. The *Ihya’* is not a book of Islamic law per se, but al-Ghazzālī adopts the structure and layout of an Islamic law manual in order to introduce his theology and philosophy to an audience of Islamic scholars, for whom legal literature was the primary genre of study and discourse.

CHAPTER 5: THE SPIRIT OF RITUAL AND THE LETTER OF THE LAW

1. Rawski, “A Historian’s Approach,” p. 22.
2. Watson, “Rites or Beliefs?” p. 83.
3. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, p. 15.
4. *Book of Rites* II, quoted in Hsieh, ‘Filial Piety and Chinese Society,’ in Moore, *The Chinese Mind*, p. 183.
5. Cf. *Analects*, 5.13; 7.21.
6. Even though Confucius avoided spiritual topics in his public teaching, certain passages from the *Lunyu* demonstrate the Master’s unequivocal reverence for the creative power and supreme moral authority of Heaven (e.g., 2.4; 3.13; 7.23; 9.5; 11.9, 14.35, et al.). According to the *Lunyu* (5.3) Confucius did indeed have a discourse (*yan*) on “natural disposition” (*xing*) and the Way of Heaven, but did not share these publicly. He told his disciples that he concealed nothing from them (7.24), but he also said, “You can acquaint those above the common lot with higher things, but you cannot acquaint those below the common lot with them” (Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 108, 6.21), thus suggesting a hierarchy of initiates to his teachings.
7. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 108, 6.22.
8. “The Master said: ‘The exemplary person takes the Right to be the essential substance of action and employs the principle of Ritual for its implementation’” (*Analects*, 5.18).
9. Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 85, 3:12.
10. Ibid., p. 203, 17.2.
11. See, e.g., Paul R. Powers, “Interiors, Intentions, and the ‘Spirituality’ of Islamic Ritual Practice,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religions* 72.21 (June 2004): p. 427.
12. Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, p. xxxiii.
13. al-Nawawī, *Al-Arba‘ūn al-Nawawīyya*, pp. 28–33.
14. Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, pp. xxxiii–xxxiv.
15. Robert Durie Osborn (1878), cited in William St. Clair Tisdall, *The Religion of the Crescent*, 3rd ed. (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1910), p. 57, quoted in Powers, “Interiors,” p. 426.
16. al-Nawawī, *Al-Arba‘ūn*, p. 27.
17. Powers, “Interiors,” p. 427.

18. Ibid.
19. 107:4-6.
20. 103:2-3.
21. Murata and Chittick, *Vision of Islam*, p. 10.
22. Ibid., p. 11.
23. Ibid.
24. Liu Zhi, "Nianzhen pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 45.
25. Ibid., p. 47.
26. al-Nawawī, *Al-Arba'ūn*, p. 31.
27. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 6.
28. Ibid.
29. Confucius outlined for Yan Yuan the steps to achieving perfect virtue, saying, "Do not look at anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not listen to anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not speak about anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety; do not do anything that violates the observance of ritual propriety" (Ames and Rosemont, *Analects*, p. 152, 12.1).
30. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 1.
31. *Gang*, which literally means the "headrope of a fishing net," has evolved the abstract meaning of a "key link" or "guiding principle." As applied to literature, it refers to the general outline or main meaning of a text. The literal meaning of the term *mu* is "eye," whence comes the verbal meaning "to look" or "to regard." It also has an alternate meaning of "chief" or "most important." When used in reference to literature, it bears the conventional meaning of an index or catalogue, but may also refer to the items or categories, headings or chief points in the contents of a text. The derivation of this literary meaning is not clear, but it may be related to the act of looking items up in a list.
32. Liu Zhi, "Liyao," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b1.
33. Ibid.
34. That is, *qi*, or vital energy, discussed below.
35. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 15.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid. Cf. Zhuangzi's discourse on the nature and function of the Way, in which, for example, he stated, "That which treats things as things is not limited by things . . . [The Way] makes them full and empty without itself filling or emptying" (*Zhuangzi*, "Knowledge Wanders North," ch. 22 in Burton Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1968], pp. 241-242).
38. Quoted in Chan, *Source Book*, p. 570.
39. See *ibid.*, p. 519.
40. Chen, *Neo-Confucian Terms*, p. 190. Traditionally translated as the "five elements" (metal, wood, water, fire, earth), contemporary scholars have recently opted to characterize these not as fixed physical substances, but rather as "phases" in the eternal, constantly changing

patterns of phenomenal reality (consistent with Chen Chun's statement). Thus "water" is not necessarily liquid H₂O, but rather a phase through which all reality goes, in a fixed pattern of serial transformations, within which that reality takes particular forms, represented by these five material substances.

41. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 37.
42. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 16.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid. That is, although it appears to the senses that substance precedes function in existence and development, this is merely an illusion of our perception. In reality, substance and function are coexistent and coeternal.
45. Ibid.
46. Chan, *Source Book*, p. 519.
47. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 19.
48. Ibid.
49. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 52.
50. Jin Yijiu, *Zhongguo yisilan tanmi* (Beijing: Eastern Press, 1999), p. 35.
51. Wang Daiyu, "Xing ming," in *Zhengjiao zhenquan*, p. 55.
52. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 52.
53. Jin Yijiu, *Zhongguo yisilan tanmi*, p. 37.
54. Ibid., p. 36.
55. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 19.
56. Daoist and Buddhist metaphysical concepts had been synthesized into Neo-Confucianism centuries earlier and Persian religious motifs and Gnostic influences had certainly made their way into Sufism during the medieval period as well (see, e.g., Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 138).
57. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 19.
58. Liu Zhi translated the titles as *Shuzhen pian*, literally, the "Kind and Gentle True Chapter" ("Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 20).
59. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 20.
60. Ibid.
61. Ibid. The wording clearly alludes to the *Lunyü*: "My Way is that of an all-penetrating oneness" (IV:xv).
62. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 21.
63. The Qur'ān has a similarly nonspecific decree against dualism: "Allah has said: 'Do not take for worship two gods,' for He is one God, 'So fear Me alone'" (16:51).
64. For the explicit Qur'ānic condemnation of Trinitarianism, see 2:116; 4:171; 5:72-73; 6:100-101; 10:68; 19:35; 23:91; et al.
65. Liu Zhi, "Zhenzai pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 21.
66. Ibid.
67. Liu Zhi, "Renshi pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 23.

68. Ibid.
69. The *locus classicus* for this Confucian maxim is, therefore, *Daxue* I.4 (see Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, pp. 92–93). The fifth chapter of the *Daxue*, now lost, explained the meaning of “apprehending the principle in things and extending knowledge” in detail. Modern editions contain, in its place, a reconstruction of that ancient commentary, based on the views of one of the Cheng brothers, according to Zhu Xi (see James Legge, trans. *Confucius: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning and The Doctrine of the Mean* [New York: Dover, 1971], p. 365).
70. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 23.
71. Ibid.
72. Ibid.
73. Ibid.
74. Ibid., pp. 23–24.
75. Ibid., p. 24.
76. Ibid.
77. Ibid.
78. Ibid. This term literally means “the likes of those who desire desolation and annihilation.” It is a fairly common pejorative for Daoists and Buddhists, especially the latter, found in Confucian polemics.
79. Ibid.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. See, e.g., 3:70–71, 187, 199.
83. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 24.
84. Ibid., p. 25.
85. Generally speaking, the central notion of the Yogācāra school is that

[E]verything experienceable is “mind only” (*cittamātra*); things exist only as *processes* of knowledge, not as “objects”; outside the knowing process they have no reality. The “external world” is thus “purely mind.” Just as there are no things qua objects, there is also no subject who experiences. Perception is a process of creative imagination that produces apparently outer objects. (Ingrid Fischer-Schreiber, Franz-Karl Ehrhard, and Michael S. Diener, *The Shambhala Dictionary of Buddhism and Zen*, trans. Michael H. Kohn [Boston: Shambhala, 1991], p. 253)

In China, Yogācāra teachings evolved into the *faxiang* (lit. “characteristics of *dharma*”) school, which maintained the central theory that “everything is only ideation,” and that the mind was the source of phenomenal reality. It will be recalled that in the late Ming period, San Huai, a scholar of this school, engaged in heated debate with the Jesuit Ricci,

arguing that the idea of a transcendent creator who is independent of causality is illogical and absurd. Liu Zhi may well have had these celebrated debates in mind when he wrote this passage.

86. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 25.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Presumably, Liu Zhi is referring to ancient sovereigns more commonly called the Three Emperors (Fuxi; Shennong; Huangdi) and the Five Rulers (2952–2205 BCE, Taihao; Yandi; Huangdi; Shaodi; Zhuanxu), who epitomize the ideal of the virtuous ruler.
94. *Di* is an abbreviation of Shangdi, the ancient Chinese supreme deity.
95. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 32.
96. Cheng Yi (1033–1107 CE), or Cheng Yichuan, is the younger of the famous Cheng brothers, early exponents of the Neo-Confucian synthesis in the Northern Song period (960–1127 CE).
97. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 32. Cf. Cheng Yi, *Henan chengshi yishu*, 31/10, 145/7, and 314/6.
98. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 33.
99. Ibid., p. 25.
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid., p. 26.
102. Ibid., p. 25.
103. In fact, an alternate name for Song Neo-Confucian philosophy was *Lixue*, the “Study of Principle.”
104. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 26.
105. Ibid.
106. This verbal translation of *ming* as the act of “illuminating” the Way is related to a term found frequently in the *Daxue*, *mingde*, translated as “inborn luminous virtue” (see e.g. Gardner, *Chu Hsi*, pp. 52–53). To Neo-Confucians like Zhu Xi, whose interpretation of Confucian literature was inherited by scholars like Liu Zhi, the central concern of Confucian self-cultivation was to bring forth one’s inborn luminous virtue and, by extension, to illuminate the Way of Heaven by properly implementing and following the Way of Man.
107. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 33.
108. Ibid., p. 26.
109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid., p. 27.

112. Ibid.
113. Ibid., p. 28.
114. Ibid., p. 29.
115. Ibid.
116. Ibid. Since Liu Zhi provided no chapter or verse, we are left to guess exactly which he was quoting. Based on the contents, this seems to be a conflation of two similar verses, 41:53 and 51:20–21.
117. Ibid., p. 30.
118. Ibid. Ma Zhu cites the same Ḥadīth, but renders it differently in Chinese (Ma Zhu, “Tiren,” in *Qingzhen zhinan*, p. 157)
119. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 30.
120. Ibid. Cf. the saying of Ibn al-‘Arabī, attributed to the Prophet: “The believer is the mirror of the Believer” (Muḥyi al-Dīn Ibn al-‘Arabī, “Whoso Knoweth Himself . . .” from the *Treatise on Being (Risālat al-Wujūdiyya)*, trans. T. H. Weir [Abingdon, England: Beshara Publications, 1976, reissued 1988], p. 21).
 Perhaps Liu Zhi had been inspired in his theories on the macrocosm-microcosm connection by Ma Zhu, who wrote, “Seen from the outside, Heaven and Earth are the great world, and humankind lives within it. Speaking from the inside, humankind is the great world, and Heaven and Earth live within it” (Ma Zhu, “Tiren,” in *Qingzhen zhinan*, p. 153, trans. Jonathan Lipman in personal communication).
121. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 30.
122. Ibid.
123. Ibid., pp. 30–31.
124. Chen Beixi is an alternate name of Chen Chun (1153–1217).
125. See chapter 6 below for a more detailed discussion of similarities and differences between Ricci’s and Liu Zhi’s theology and possible influences of the former upon the latter.
126. Liu Zhi, “Diyan pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 35.
127. Ibid.
128. Ibid., p. 37.
129. Ibid., p. 38. This is none other than the a list of the seven articles of faith: belief in God; his angels; his scriptures; his messengers; the day of judgment; that destiny, whether good or evil, comes from God most high; and belief in the resurrection after death.
130. Ibid.
131. Ibid.
132. Liu Zhi wrote:

Pure indeed is the True Lord. All praise in the world returns to Him. The myriad creatures are not the Lord; there is only the True Lord. The True Lord is the greatest. There is no time and no power except through the venerable Lord. (Liu Zhi, “Diyan pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 39)

This is a translation of a string of exclamations traditionally uttered by Muslims in praise of God. Liu Zhi's translation has altered them slightly, but they are still easily recognizable as *subhān Allāh* ("glory be to God"), *al-ḥamdu li'llāh* ("praise be to God"), *lā ilāha illa' Allāh* ("there is no god but God"), *Allāhu akbar* ("God is the greatest"), and *lā ḥawla wa lā quwwa illa bi'llāh* ("there is no strength or power save in God").

133. Liu Zhi, "Diyan pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 39.
134. Liu Zhi, "Yuanjiao pian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 5.
135. Ibid., p. 6.
136. Liu Zhi, "Minchang yi: Zonggang," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 151.
137. Ibid., pp. 155–156.
138. Liu Zhi, "Minchang er: Guanfu," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 172.
139. Mirroring similar debates within Islam, medieval Jewish scholars engaged in lengthy discussions about these questions. Maimonides, for example, wrote that those "who trouble themselves to find a cause for any of these detailed rules are in my eyes devoid of sense," implying deference to the authority of revelation. Yet, "Maimonides saw the inconsistency (between revealed commandments and rationalistic explanations) and was led by it into contradiction" (Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [London: Routledge, 1991], p. 49). Besides being a theologian, Maimonides was a medical doctor, and so "was also disposed to believe that the dietary rules had a sound physiological basis" (ibid., p. 44). He also invoked historical arguments "that some of the more mysterious commands of the law had as their object to make a sharp break with heathen practices" (ibid., p. 48).

The latter notion is at the heart of more modern studies of ritual purity and pollution, which maintain that the main purpose of taboos is to create a clear distinction between the sacred and the profane, or between the moral "in-group" and the dangerous "other." Interestingly, though wholly unconscious of it, Chinese Muslims, with their maintenance of the pork taboo in the face of overwhelming pressure to assimilate, continue to conform to this theoretical framework. A carryover from the ancient traditions inherited by Islam, even in China today the consumption of pork is seen by Muslims as polluting, and its avoidance as the fulcrum for an abstract notion of purity (i.e., *qingzhen*, "pure and true") and the criterion for defining group membership.

140. Over the centuries people have offered health- and hygiene-related explanations for certain dietary laws. Orthodox Islamic scholars, while acknowledging that there are health benefits associated with certain rules, nevertheless maintain that these aspects of the law are ancillary and that the reason one is to abstain from something is that God has commanded it. This understanding is consistent with Douglas' observation that "it is one thing to point out the side benefits of ritual actions, and another thing to be content with using the by-products as a sufficient explanation" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 29). We may speculate about historical or medical reasons for religious taboos, and there may indeed have been some traditional knowledge that originally inspired them. However, in many

- cases, dietary laws and rules of ritual purity and pollution are best understood anthropologically and sociologically as manifestations of communal thinking about group definition and avoidance of danger from contamination, symbolic as well as physical.
141. 6:145.
142. The difficulty in harmonizing materialist rationalizations with the internal logic of religious traditions is highlighted when the explanation for one rule contradicts, or fails to apply to, another. Thus the rationalization of all Islamic dietary law as being based on health concerns is weakened by the Qur'ānic prohibition of alcohol (2:219), which acknowledges potential benefits of drinking, but stresses the moral notion that its sinfulness outweighs any positive effects.
143. Liu Zhi, "Yinshi shangpian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 173.
144. This type of rationalization on Liu Zhi's part conforms to Douglas' theory that "pollution beliefs can uphold the moral code" (Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 133) and allows certain taboos to be justified on moral grounds, a second level of explanation beyond the more basic notion that something is forbidden simply by divine fiat.
145. Cf. Raphael Israeli, *Muslims in China: A Study in Cultural Confrontation*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 29 (Copenhagen: Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, 1980), p. 22.
146. Certainly many assimilated Chinese Muslims (in some instances ex-Muslims might be a better term) have first been tempted and then persuaded to consume pork, though it usually constitutes one of the last Islamic prohibitions to be abandoned in the acculturation process.
147. Liu Zhi, "Yinshi xiapian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 190. Cf. Dru C. Gladney, *Muslim China: Ethnic Nationalism in the People's Republic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 186. Similar arguments, with significant sociological implications, are put forward by contemporary Hui in the People's Republic of China (see Maris Boyd Gillette, *Between Mecca and Beijing: Modernization and Consumption Among Urban Chinese Muslims* [Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000], pp. 120–122, 128–130).
148. Liu Zhi, "Yinshi xiapian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 190. Of course, Liu Zhi failed to acknowledge the common prohibition of pork in Judaism.
149. Ibid.
150. Mooncakes (*yuebing*) are egg-based pastries eaten on the occasion of the Chinese lunar mid-autumn festival (*zhongqiujie*).
151. Ibid.
152. *Sunan ibn māja*, vol. 3, "*Kitāb al-khumūr*" (Book of Intoxicants), ch. 30, Ḥadīth No. 3371.
153. Liu Zhi, "Yinshi xiapian," in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 194.
154. Ibid.
155. Ibid.
156. "O you who believe, do not approach your prayers when you are in a state of intoxication" (4:43). The existence of this verse suggests the possibility that intoxication was otherwise tolerated at the time of this revelation.

157. Watson, “Chinese Funerary Rites,” p. 3.
158. Liu Zhi, “Hunying pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 217.
159. Peter J. Awn, “Faith and Practice,” in Marjorie Kelly, ed. *Islam: The Religious and Political Life of a World Community*, p. 14 (New York: Praeger, 1984).
160. See Clifford Geertz, *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

CHAPTER 6: ALLAH'S CHINESE NAME

1. Liu Zhi, “Zi xu,” in *Tianfang dianli*, pp. a11–2.
2. Liu Zhi, “Liyan,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. b2.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. See Wang, *Glossary of Chinese Islamic Terms*, p. 8.
6. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 6.
7. Ibid.
8. Liu Zhi, “Zhenzai pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 26.
9. Notwithstanding the commonly accepted etymology of the name as a contraction of the Arabic *al-ilāh*, meaning “the god.”
10. 17:110.
11. Raphael Israeli, “Translation as Exegesis,” in Peter G. Riddell and Tony Street, eds. *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society (A Festschrift in Honour of Anthony H. Johns)*, p. 90 (Leiden: Brill, 1997).
12. For a list of some of the divine nomenclature used by Muslims, see Isaac Mason, *List of Chinese-Moslem Terms* (Shanghai: Committee on Work for Moslems of the China Continuation Committee, 1919), pp. 10, 15.
13. Jin Yijiu cites two different Song dynasty sources in which the Muslim deity is called “Buddha,” as well as two others where the Prophet Muhammad is referred to as a Buddha (Jin Yijiu, “The Qur’ān in China” in Richard C. Martin, “Islam in Local Contexts,” vol. 17, *Contributions to Asian Studies*, p. 96 [Leiden: Brill, 1982]).
14. Cited in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 18.
15. Zhuangzi, “Discussion on Making things Equal,” ch. 2 in Watson, trans., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 38.
16. It should be noted, however, that the root meaning of *zai* is far from abstract. It was used as a noun referring to a civil authority, such as a minister or prefect, and it is from this usage that we may translate it generically as “master.” This usage, in turn, comes from its verbal meaning “to slaughter” and, by extension, “to govern,” probably from the idea that one in authority holds the power of life and death over his subjects.
17. Israeli, “Translation as Exegesis,” p. 91.

18. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 31.
19. Ibid.
20. Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 148.
21. Ibid., p. 151.
22. Ibid., p. 148.
23. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 32.
24. Wang Jianping, “Concord and Conflict: The Hui Communities of Yunnan Society in a Historical Perspective,” *Lund Studies in African and Asian Religions* 11 (1996): p. 197.
25. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 25.
26. David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1989), pp. 61–62.
27. Ibid., pp. 63–64.
28. Lancashire and Hu, “Translators’ Introduction,” in Ricci, *True Meaning*, p. 34.
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid.
32. Of course, both the Japanese and Koreans had developed syllabaries, which for centuries enabled them to make much more extensive use of transliteration of foreign terms.
33. *Fonti Ricciane*, I, p. 186, quoted in Lancashire and Hu, “Translators’ Introduction,” in Ricci, *True Meaning*, p. 34.
34. Apart from speculating what else he may have read, Liu Zhi actually quoted directly from a Jesuit book in the *Tianfang dianli*. This was the *Zhifangwai ji* (Record of Areas beyond the Tribute States), by Giulio Aleni, S.J. (1592–1649), a chronicle of world history and geography from a Western perspective in Chinese (see Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 2).
35. See Israeli, “Translation as Exegesis,” p. 91.
36. Jin Yijiu, *Zhongguo yisilan tanmi*. Beijing: Eastern Press, 1999, pp. 33–34.
37. 5:5.
38. Liu Zhi, “Yinshi xiapian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 195.
39. Rudolph Loewenthal, “The Nomenclature of Jews in China,” *Monumenta Serica* 12 (1947): pp. 91–126; reprinted in 1971, p. 73.
40. Ibid., pp. 68–72.
41. Another possible source could be other Han Kitāb texts. Ma Zhu, for one, does refer in his *Qingzhen zhinan* to an unspecified battle in which the Prophet’s army opposed “Jews” (Ma Zhu, “Zhenci,” in *Qingzhen zhinan*, p. 144). Ma Zhu uses the different, albeit similar-sounding, transliteration *zhuhuodai*, which characters translate to something like “punish with death,” “catch,” “evil” (the characters Liu Zhi uses translate literally as “celebrate,” “tiger,” “land”).
42. Nestorian texts have Moushi, while the Jesuits opted for Meise (see Loewenthal, “Nomenclature of Jews in China,” pp. 56–57).

43. The Latin title of this now defunct 1584 publication was *Vera et Brevis Divinarum Rerum Expositio* (Lancashire and Hu, “Translators’ Introduction,” in Ricci, *True Meaning*, p. 12).
44. Liu Zhi, “Zhenzai pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 20.
45. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 1.
46. Spence, *Memory Palace*, p. 122.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
48. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 14, 38.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 44, 52.
50. Mungello, *Curious Land*, p. 167.
51. Syriac being a Semitic language, the Nestorian name for God, Aloha, is cognate with the Hebrew *eloh* (pl. *elohim*), as well as the Arabic *ilāh*, from which, philologists maintain, the name Allah is derived.
52. Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents*, p. 1.
53. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 58, 80.
54. *Ibid.*, pt. II, p. 123.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 127.
56. The name *qingzhenjiao*, “Pure and True Teaching,” has ancient Chinese Buddhist roots, but eventually, after this Jewish usage, came to be applied exclusively to Islam in China. Today it is universally understood to be the preferred term by which Chinese Muslims refer to their own faith and community. Interestingly, this 1679 Jewish inscription from Kaifeng echoes the usage of the term *qingzhen* in the earlier inscription of 1489, which refers to the synagogue as *qingzhensi*, “temple of the Pure and True,” a name that was also later co-opted by Chinese Muslims and which to this day functions as the Chinese word for “mosque.”
57. White, *Chinese Jews*, pt. II, pp. 137. The inscription is undated, but we know that Zhao Zuomei earned the degree of *xiucai* in 1729.
58. *Ibid.*, p. 144. The inscription is undated, but the names of Ai Yingkui and two of his (presumably adult) sons appear in the stone tablet inscription of 1663.
59. Spence, *Memory Palace*, p. 121.
60. Loewenthal, “Nomenclature of Jews in China,” pp. 82–83.
61. Erik Zürcher, “Jesuit Accommodation and the Chinese Cultural Imperative,” in David E. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler, 1994), cited in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 5. While Zürcher’s thesis is narrowly sino-centric, I believe it is possible to see it as part of a larger picture of assimilation and accommodation, just as sinicization may be viewed as a culturally specifically instance of a universal phenomenon of acculturation. Acculturation, as I have noted above, is a normal process, undergone by all immigrant communities wherever they lodge, albeit at different paces, with different constraints and resistances, and with different results. No sojourner community could manage to live in a different culture for centuries without taking on some of its language, customs, values, ideas, texts, etc. In this respect, Jews, Muslims,

- and Christians are analogous to Jews in Europe, or Chinese Americans, or any number of similar examples.
62. In China, the Rites Controversy led to the Kangxi emperor's harsh rebuke of Christianity, reversing his 1692 Edict of Toleration, in response to papal intolerance of Chinese tradition. In Europe, under pressure from rival (Dominican and Franciscan) religious orders, Clement XI issued a papal bull in 1715 condemning Jesuit methods and Catholic practice in China and severely curtailed the activities of the China mission, which contributed to the complete suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773.
 63. Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 5.
 64. Ricci, *True Meaning*, pp. 114–115.
 65. *Ibid.*, pp. 108–109.
 66. Liu Zhi, “Yuanjiao pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 1.
 67. Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 26.
 68. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
 69. While other Han Kitāb writers did not explicitly mention that they read European (Jesuit) literature, as Liu Zhi did, they nevertheless had ample opportunity to do so. The first extant Han Kitāb dates to the mid-seventeenth century, by which point the *Tianzhu shiyi* would have been available (and well propagandized) for nearly four decades.
 70. Cf. Ricci, *True Meaning*, pp. 120–121; Liu Zhi, “Renshi pian,” in *Tianfang dianli*, p. 26.
 71. Spence, *Memory Palace*, p. 122.
 72. The *Great Learning* (*Daxue*), *Doctrine of the Mean* (*Zhongyong*), *Analects* (*Lunyu*), and *Mencius* (*Mengzi*).
 73. Ricci's justification for using and regarding these texts as the original “scriptures” of the ancient Confucian sages overlooks the deliberate choice of the Song Neo-Confucian reformers to make the Four Books the cornerstones of their canon. The *Daxue* and *Zhongyong*, in particular, had been relatively obscure texts in the Zhou-Han period of “primitive” Confucianism that Ricci and the Jesuits idealized. There was nothing “primordial” about these books, whose inclusion in the later canon was itself a manifestation of Neo-Confucian values.
 74. The *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), *Book of Odes* (*Shijing*), *Book of History* (*Shujing*), *Record of Rites* (*Liji*), and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* (*Chunqiu*).
 75. It was centuries between the first arrival of Buddhism in China and the coherent translation and naturalization of Buddhist teachings in Chinese, with many false starts and dead ends in the process. Even some five hundred years after the arrival of Buddhism, the Confucian literatus Han Yu (768–824) still polemicized against it as a foreign faith.
 76. In contrast with the targeted mission of the Jesuits, the transmission of Buddhism and Nestorian Christianity into China was not monolithic. Dedicated proselytizing efforts were part of the early phase of this process for both faiths, but they were also introduced gradually and organically by lay believers as well. In fact, apart from its antiquity, the story of Buddhism in China has many similarities to those of the Abrahamic monotheisms.

In some ways, the Buddhist trajectory actually had quite a bit in common with that of the Muslims: Several centuries of incoming non-Chinese adherents (in the case of the Buddhists, mostly monks and merchants) did little to produce a viable Buddhist literature until the Central Asian monk Kumārajīva (344–413) came to Chang'an to embark on his prolific translation project, and thereafter an indigenously generated textual tradition grew. The major distinction is the clerical background of the major figures in this process, as distinguished from the Chinese Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim writers, whose lives conformed to the familial and social norms of Confucian society.

77. Zürcher, “Jesuit Accommodation,” p. 64, quoted in Murata, *Chinese Gleams*, p. 5.
78. Ibid.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

1. See Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, p. 188.
2. Cf. Lipman, *Familiar Strangers*, pp. 98–99; and Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 215–222.
3. See Ben-Dor, *Dao of Muhammad*, pp. 174–177.
4. See Mencius, *Wan Zhang*. Book II, verse 1. The phrase *jidacheng*, as applied to Muḥammad, occurs in Yuan Guozuo’s preface to the 1785 edition of Liu Zhi’s *Tianfang zhisheng shilu* (Yuan Guozuo, “Xu,” in Bai, ed., *Huizu renwu zhi [Qingdai]*, p. 226).
5. “To Allah belong the East and the West, so wherever you turn, there is the face of Allah” (2:115).
6. 55:17.
7. Of course, not all Chinese Muslims maintained this civil tone at all times. Some, such as the bandits of Henan and Shandong or the rebels of Gansu, did not. As we have seen, the Qing emperors were willing and able to distinguish between different groups of Muslims in their realm. Lipman explores these perceptions of “acceptable” and “unacceptable” Muslims under Qing law in his chapter “A Fierce and Brutal People,” in Pamela Kyle Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity, and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).
8. I do not mean to belittle the genuine suffering of those who were persecuted for heterodoxy throughout Chinese history. Jonathan Spence’s *Treason by the Book* addresses the issues of heterodoxy and the ostensibly civil tone of inquisition during the reign of the Yongzheng emperor (1722–1735), just after Liu Zhi’s death. As I pointed out earlier, the *Siku quanshu* literary compendium project of the subsequent Qianlong reign was not just an attempt to collect but also to censor, to eliminate adverse intellectual currents. People suffered during that inquisition, not just texts.
9. Even so, we must not overlook instances in which this civility was violated. See notes 7 and 8 above.

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- Zoroastrianism, 20, 133, 140
- Zuo Tang, 59, 63, 69

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